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Perspectives

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Reb Aizil Homiler

*Biography,
Correspondence
& Anecdotes*

A Glimpse from Up-Close

Reb Yoel Kahn

The Whole Picture

The Tolna Rebbe

Not "Minor" Details

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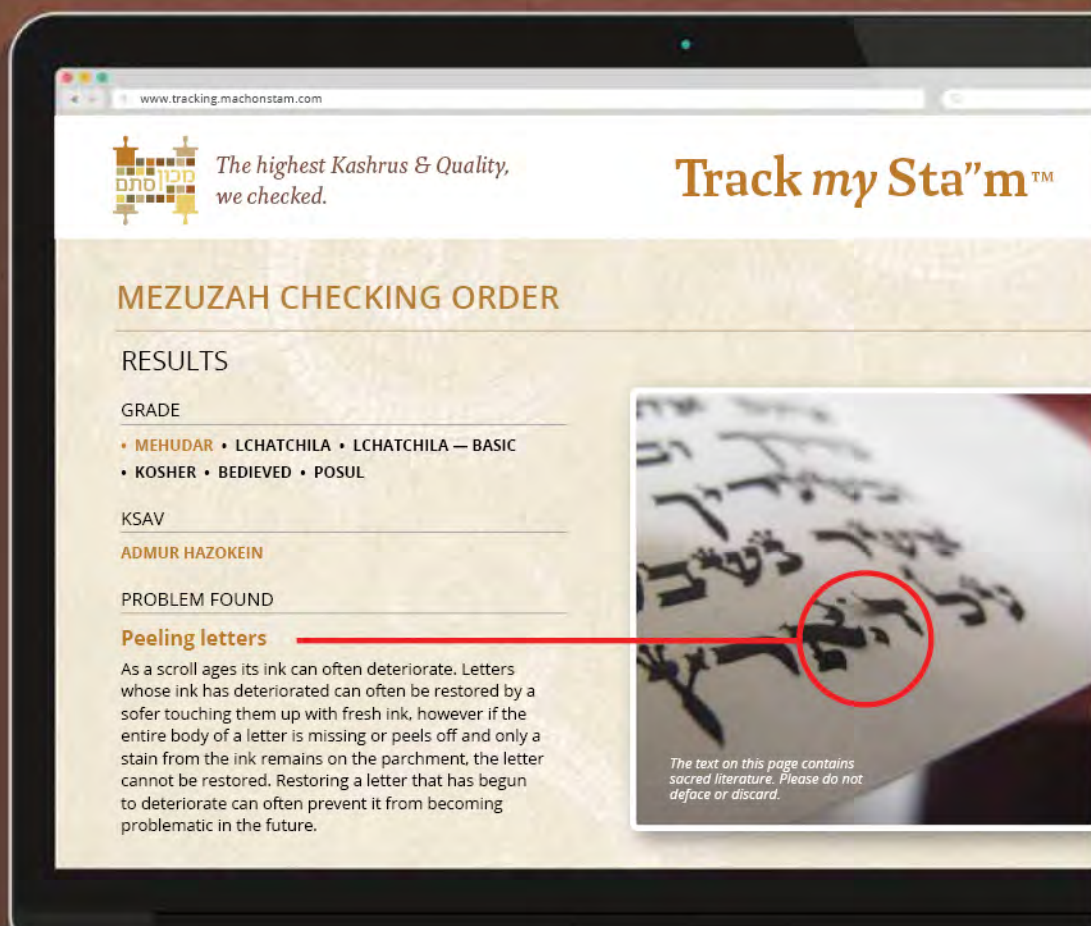
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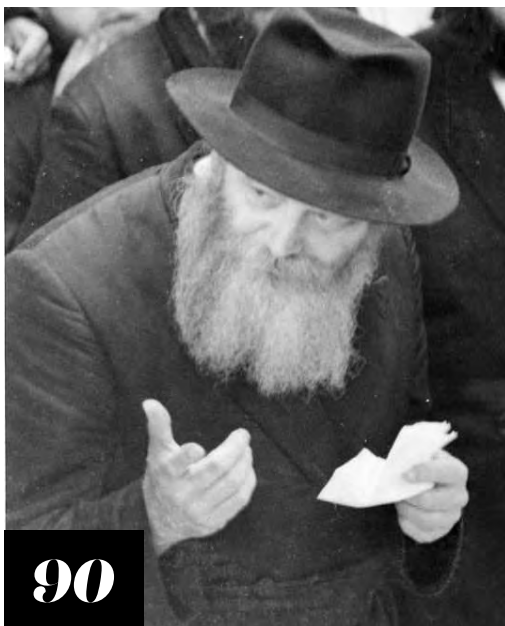
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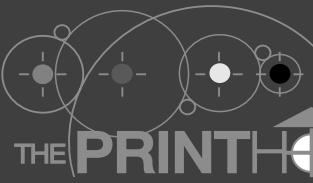
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To Think Like The Rebbe



The Alter Rebbe always kept a watch on his *yeichidus* table. One time, a chossid was in the Rebbe's room when the Rebbe stepped out. Noticing that the Rebbe's watch was not in line with the time on his own, he adjusted the Rebbe's watch.

When the Rebbe returned, he glanced at his watch and asked the chossid if he touched it. "Yes," the chossid replied innocently, "I saw that the Rebbe's watch was inaccurate so I adjusted it to the correct time."

"And how do you know that your watch is accurate?" asked the Rebbe. "Rebbe," the man exclaimed, "my watch is very reliable and never skips even a second."

The Rebbe smiled kindly as he returned the watch back to its original time. "This watch is set according to the supernal permutations (*tzirufim*) of the G-dly names of *Havaya* and *Elokim* which change every hour," he said, "and it is certain to have the exact time."¹



ON THE SUBJECT OF *HISKASHRUS*, our Rebbeim have said that true connection to the Rebbe, is achieved through learning his Torah.² Aside from the spiritual capacity of Torah to unite the learner and the teacher, there is a human, psychological, link that is formed from the study of the Rebbe's (or, conversely, anyone else's) worldview. Since the mind is at the core of the human experience, when our minds follow the Rebbe's thought pattern, we become closer to who he is.

1. *Likutei Sipurim* (Perlov), Alter Rebbe §11. 2. *HaYom Yom* 24 Sivan.



However, we must open our minds to what the Rebbe is saying. If we only insert the Rebbe's directives into our old worldview, we will miss the point, and even if we manage to retain all the particulars we won't have the Rebbe's true perspective. This is because connecting to the Rebbe's worldview is not about merely comprehending the content of what is said, but about appreciating the axioms supporting it.

When the Rebbe speaks passionately about *shleimus ha'aretz*, it's obvious that we recognize that portions of the Holy Land are not to be given away. That is the content. The implied worldview however, is that Torah Law reigns supreme, and that even in the face of so called "pragmatism", the Torah Way will always be more successful.

Another example.

When the Rebbe advocates not teaching boys secular studies, it obviously means just that, that the Rebbe wants boys to study only Torah. But to teach the child only *limmudei kodesh* at school, and then expose him to secular media at home is of course considerably more harmful.

In this regard, there is an advantage in reading the Rebbe's *farbrengens* and letters, in the "raw". There, we can follow the Rebbe's analysis of day-to-day issues; expositions that don't make for short inspirational clips. A consistent reading of a broad selection of complete, uncut, unflashy, sources – steeps us with the Rebbe's mindset. We begin to see the world as our Rebbe sees it.

We will then align our clocks to the Rebbe's, and not the Rebbe's to ours.

Rabbi Shimon Hellinger

General Editor

The Job of a **Teacher**

THE REBBE'S PERSPECTIVE

How can we overcome insurmountable challenges?

Why aren't today's schools what they used to be?

What should parent's demand of their child's teacher?

In this sicha from Shavuot 5734 (1974)¹ the Rebbe addresses these questions:

SUPRA-LOGICAL COMMITMENT

Chazal famously say, "If someone tells you that there is wisdom amongst the nations – you can believe them; but if they tell you that there is Torah amongst the nations – do not believe them."

The meaning of this is as follows:

"Wisdom" means to live according to reason. Logic dictates that a person should honor their parents in appreciation of everything they have done for him, and otherwise he is not a virtuous person. However, if a person is not interested in being virtuous, logic has nothing to offer him.

¹. Unedited – printed in *Sichos Kodesh* 5734 Vol. 2 pp. 161-164.



The teacher must recognize that he was hired to make his students to be complete *Yidden*. He cannot suffice with teaching them the "subject" of *Chumash* or *Gemara*, and hope that the "spark in it will draw them to good," for until then precious time is lost...

"Torah" means to follow Hashem's instructions. Indeed we were commanded to understand the *mitzvos*, but that doesn't stop us from observing what we don't understand. Since Hashem is infinitely greater than us, it comes as no surprise that we can't understand Him. On the contrary, it is a wonder that we *can* understand some of the *mitzvos*...

When a person faces a monumental challenge, logic cannot help him overcome it, since willpower is stronger than logic. The story is told of the great intellectual Aristotle who was caught in an immoral act which was inconsistent with the ideals and ethics that he preached. When his students questioned him about it he replied, "Right now I am not 'Aristotle.'" He understood that what he was doing was wrong, but he could not overcome his desire.



That's why it is critical that the will of a person should be attached to something which is **above** his will, which will hold his will in place.

EDUCATION, NOT INFORMATION

This point is especially relevant to *chinuch*:

Once upon a time when a child went to *cheder* he was taught only knowledge, the laws of the Torah, because the essence of Torah life he received at home. Since his parents had to work, they sent their child to study in *cheder*, but *frumkeit* he received at home and even in the streets.

In recent times, the world has become mixed up and parents no longer have to time to educate their children, so the child becomes reliant on the *cheder* for both Torah life and Torah knowledge. Should a teacher only teach a child *Chumash* and *Mishna*, the child will be lacking Torah life which is most important.

A teacher cannot argue that he teaches as he himself was taught, since he grew up before today's "*mabul*." Nowadays, the approach must be different, for otherwise the main thing will be lacking. The teacher must recognize that he was hired to make his students to be complete *Yidden*. He cannot suffice with teaching them the "subject" of *Chumash* or *Gemara*, and hope that the "spark in it will draw them to good," for until then precious time is lost...

Furthermore, once the child is educated properly, he will on his own pursue the study of knowledge, since he has been educated that "Torah is the best commodity" and it is "more precious than gems."

RECOGNIZING THEIR JOB

This matter is unfortunately one of those that has yet to be rectified.

What this means is the following: When a parent sends a child to school ("*beis chinuch*") they must tell the school that the first thing that they want is that their child should be a "*Yid*." Even if the parents don't demand this, the teachers must recognize that this is their job.

The main duty of parents and teachers is to cultivate the child's affinity for Torah, which should express itself openly and should saturate all of his limbs. Then the child will be a healthy child.

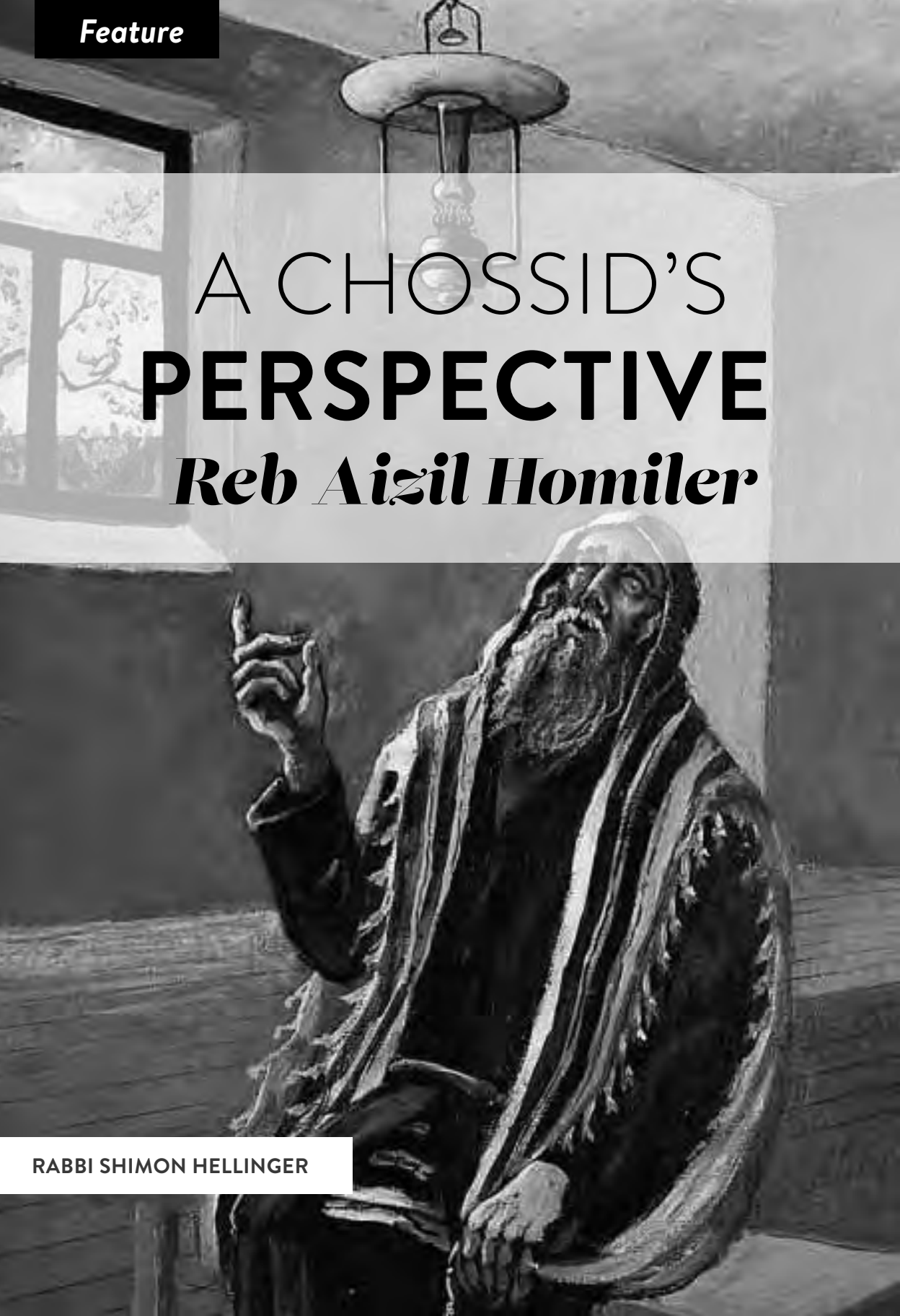
In Summary

- The only way to overcome certain challenges is by submitting to a higher power. Logic alone will not hold us back from doing what we want to do.
- In days past, schools were meant to build upon the Torah commitment that a child was given at home and in the community. Today, it's the job of the school to give the child that commitment.
- Parents should demand of their child's teacher to give priority to making their child a strong "*Yid*," ahead of memorizing Torah concepts. The spiritually healthy child will be motivated to continue studying and grow in his *Yiddishkeit*. **P**

Feature

A CHOSSID'S **PERSPECTIVE** *Reb Aizil Homiler*

RABBI SHIMON HELLINGER



A Life of Chassidus

Reb Yitzchak Aizik Epshtein, or Reb Aizil Homiler, was one of the greatest Chabad chassidim of all time. He is praised by the Frierdiker Rebbe for his genius in Torah, one that earned fame even in the distant Vilna, and for his descriptive imagination with an eloquent delivery. He had a pleasant demeanor even with ordinary townsmen and he was well liked by all.

Reb Groinem, the legendary mashpia in Lubavitch, summed it up: “Reb Aizil was a man of all talents. He was incredible in the intellectual understanding of *Chassidus* (*baskala*) and its application in life (*avoda*), in the study of revealed parts of Torah and of Chassidus, in the ways of Chassidus and in the ways of the world.”



EARLY BEGINNINGS

Reb Aizil was born around the year 5530 (1770) to Reb Mordechai HaLevi Epshtein and a long line of respected *rabbonim*. In his youth, he learned under his grandfather Reb Dovid, *rov* of Halusk, excelling in the study of *Gemara*, *Poskim* and other holy works. Before the age of twenty-three, he had already learned the entire Shas with commentaries seven times (!), and prepared an extensive commentary of his own.

When Reb Aizil learned of the Alter Rebbe, he toiled in the study and *avoda* of Chassidus for two years before traveling to *yechidus*. On his way to Liozna, he stopped in a town along the way and visited the home of a seasoned *chossid*, Reb Shaul, who inspired him to spend another year in preparation. When

he finally entered *yechidus*, his *pan* read, “How can the ‘toiling soul’ draw near to *Elokus*?” As he handed the *pan* to the Alter Rebbe, he fainted.

Reb Aizil’s father was disappointed that his son had become a *chossid*, even tearing his clothing in mourning. When his son continued to conclude the entire *Shas* on *erev Pesach* as usual, he made peace with him. For the last days of Pesach his father joined the Chabad minyan that Reb Aizil established, and that Shavuot they traveled together to the Alter Rebbe.

Reb Aizil joined the Alter Rebbe’s *chadorim* (“classes”), the *yeshivah* established by the Alter Rebbe. The prerequisite for acceptance in the highest class was fluency in *Shas*, *Midrash*, the philosophical works of *Ikarim* and *Kuzari*, and basic knowledge of Zohar.

REB AIZIL HOMILER

Because of Reb Aizil's lack of fluency in the philosophical works, he was placed in the medium class. The Alter Rebbe gave him five months to familiarize himself with those books, and advised him to present all his questions to the Mittlerer Rebbe (who was still a youngster).



GROWING IN CHASSIDUS

Even as a young man, the Mittlerer Rebbe was held highly by Reb Aizil. Once, after a *farbrengen*, Reb Aizil said to the Alter Rebbe, "Hashem I know from you, Chassidus I know from your *maamorim*, but an enjoyment in Chassidus I have from your Reb Ber (the Mittlerer Rebbe)." The Alter Rebbe's face shined.

Once, the Mittlerer Rebbe asked Reb Aizil why he isn't active in influencing the other chassidim. Reb Aizil replied that he barely has a moment for his own *avoda*, how then could he find time to influence others. The Mittlerer Rebbe replied: "Aizik, Aizik, why don't you learn from me? When I see that I am hopeless, I make sure at least to help others."

One Shavuot, after Shachris, a chair was setup for the Mittlerer Rebbe outside in the courtyard, and the Mittlerer Rebbe recited a long *maamar*. After he finished, those gathered noticed that the Rebbe was preparing to speak again, so they stayed and the Rebbe recited another long talk.

After finishing the second *maamar*, the chassidim prepared to go home, but they realized that the Rebbe was getting ready to recite yet a third *maamar*.

The Tzemach Tzedek often did not come to hear the Mittlerer Rebbe's *maamorim* since he wished to remain faithful to the original teachings of the Alter Rebbe. However, this time, Reb Aizil was so excited by the fiery words of the Mittlerer Rebbe that he could not contain himself, and he grabbed the Tzemach Tzedek by his beard and said, "Mendel! Mendel! Come hear and see how *Elokus* is flowing in the streets!"

When the Mittlerer Rebbe passed away, the Tzemach Tzedek refused at first to assume the position of Rebbe. The leading chassidim turned to Reb Aizil, an eminent elder chassid, to accept the mantle of leadership. Reb Aizil acquiesced. He donned his special white garments and went outside to ascend the wagon which would take him to the gathering of chassidim. As he climbed the wagon, he suddenly recalled the Alter Rebbe words, when once handing him a piece of *shirayim*, "Aizele, Aizele, eat the *kugel*, but don't desire to become a Rebbe." Reb Aizil understood this as an order, and he retracted. He later recounted, that at the moment he placed his foot on the step of the wagon, he felt an incredible expansion of his mind and heart.



A Life of Chassidus

EMINENT CHOSSID

When the Tzemach Tzedek finally agreed to accept the *nesius* he recited a *maamar* “*Al Shlosha Devarim Ha’olam Omed*” which the Alter Rebbe had recited three and a half decades earlier (see anecdote “He’s Listening!”).

When the Tzemach Tzedek recited that *maamar*, Reb Aizil, who was present, thought to himself, “That’s a *Rebbishe kuntz* (antic of a Rebbe), to recite a *maamar* that he heard at three years old.” At that moment the Tzemach Tzedek turned to Reb Aizil and said, “You need not suspect me of trying to show antics. What should I do? *Zeide* came to me and ordered me to say this *maamar*.”

Afterwards, Reb Aizil returned to his lodgings, and came down with a heavy fever. The following day the Tzemach Tzedek visited him and said an explanation on the *maamar*. He then held Reb Aizil’s hand, and Reb Aizil sat up and recovered.

Reb Aizil often visited the Tzemach Tzedek in Lubavitch, and the Rebbe’s sons would walk outside the town to greet him. The Tzemach Tzedek showed Reb Aizil deference, allowing him to enter his room whenever he desired.

Once, in middle of a cold winter, Reb Aizil arrived in Lubavitch, and at his request, the Tzemach Tzedek recited a *maamar* on the topic of *brachos*. After *maariv* and



This time, Reb Aizil was so excited by the fiery words of the Mittlerer Rebbe that he could not contain himself, and he grabbed the Tzemach Tzedek by his beard and said, “Mendel! Mendel! Come hear and see how *Elokus* is flowing in the streets!”

a meal, Reb Aizil sat down to learn. The Tzemach Tzedek said to his sons, “Look at grandfather’s soldier. Even after a long icy trip, an old man makes sure to keep up his set *shiurim*.”

Once, the Tzemach Tzedek recited for Reb Aizil alone a teaching of the Baal Shem Tov that he had just heard in a vision from his grandfather the Alter Rebbe. When Reb Aizil left the Rebbe’s room

REB AIZIL HOMILER

At the end of what would turn out to be Reb Aizil's final visit to the Tzemach Tzedek, the Rebbe placed his head on Reb Aizil's shoulder and Reb Aizil placed his head on the Rebbe's shoulder. They stood in this position for half an hour.



he began to dance excitedly with the young chassidim in the *beis midrash*. The chassidim were naturally surprised by his unusual display of emotion, but they did not dare to ask for an explanation.

Reb Aizil was very involved in the Tzemach Tzedek's activities for *yiddishkeit* in Russia, especially with his being fluent in written and spoken Russian. He also carried out various other missions for the Tzemach Tzedek, including a visit to Reb Yisroel of Ruzhin.

At the end of what would turn out to be Reb Aizil's final visit to the Tzemach Tzedek, in the early hours of the morning, the Rebbe walked Reb Aizil out to his carriage. At first they showered each other the standard wishes of *nachas* from children and the like, but then the Rebbe placed his head on Reb Aizil's shoulder and Reb Aizil placed his head on the Rebbe's shoulder. They stood in this position for half an hour (!). Finally, they lifted their head and Reb Aizil

spoke, "Be well! It seems that we won't see each other again until Moshiach comes." The Tzemach Tzedek walked behind the carriage and raised his hands as he exclaimed, "Go in peace! Go in peace!"

Indeed, Reb Aizil did not live to see the Tzemach Tzedek again.



ROV IN HOMIL

In 5565 (1805) Reb Aizil was invited to serve as *rov* in the city of Homil. The town of Homil was a major center of Chabad, and all the townsfolk – from the learned scholars to the simple laborers – were all Chabad chassidim.

To prove his worthiness, he wrote an extensive *pilpul* on the laws of *Chalah* and sent it for review by the *lomdim* of Vietka, a scholarly suburb of Homil. Before he assumed the *rabbonus* he visited the Alter Rebbe who reminded him of his heavy responsibility not only concerning

A Life of Chassidus

halacha, but also concerning all matters of personal conduct.

Reb Aizil was held in high esteem even amongst non-chassidim, and his teachings were repeated even in Vilna, the fortress of the opposition to Chassidus. At one point he made waves in the Torah world by permitting a fish previously thought to be not-kosher. Many leading *rabbonim* upheld his ruling, and Reb Akiva Eiger expressed amazement at the existence of this unknown *gaon* in White Russia.

The Tzemach Tzedek would often consult with Reb Aizil on *halachic* issues. He once said in admiration of Reb Aizil's knowledge, "He must either be a super-genius or he is granted from Above all the knowledge he wants because he studies without any personal interest ..." The Tzemach Tzedek instructed the Rebbe Maharash to receive "*smicha*" from Reb Aizil.

Reb Aizil wrote numerous responsa in *halacha* and essays in *Chassidus* which elucidate concepts in a clear and unique style. His essays in *Chassidus* are printed in a series named *Asara Maamaros* which includes ten essays on topics of: humility and joy, Shabbos, Torah and others. Three of these essays make up the volume of *Shnei HaMeoros*. Another book is *Chono Ariel* on the *parshiyos* and *yomim tovim*.

Reb Aizil served as the Rov in Homil for 58 years, and passed away on the 26th of Iyar (*yesod shebiyesod*), 5617 (1857).

Forty years later, in 5657 (1897) a hazard threatened the cemetery where Reb Aizil was buried, and his body had to be relocated. Two brothers, Reb Zalman and Reb Mordechai Yoel Duchman, prepared themselves for the task by fasting, going to *mikva* and wearing white clothing. Finally, they opened his grave and found his body complete, as on the day he was buried.



The Tzemach Tzedek once said in admiration of Reb Aizil's knowledge, "He must either be a super genius or he is granted from Above all the knowledge he wants because he studies without any personal interest..."



CORRESPONDENCE OF *Reb Aizil Homiler*

————— **Logical Faith** —————

In these letters, Reb Aizil explains the meaning of faith in a Rebbe in a simple and logical fashion. Since the Rebbe is observably an exceptional genius, we know that he can understand the advanced concepts he discusses. From his personal commitment and sacrifice, we conclude that he is sincere and not misleading us. Having this faith in the Rebbe's comprehension of the hidden spiritual realms is essential, since it is key to hastening the *geulah*.



Wednesday, 24 Iyar 5606 (1846), Homil

To my dear friend . . . Reb Tzvi Hirsh Feigin,

Just as I invited you to visit both verbally and in writing, I will now repeat my oral thanks for your visit in writing as a token of our mutually beneficial relationship. And based on our conversations here,

I'm sure you know that I don't mean physical benefit.

When you were in my home, you mentioned several times that the

concepts of Chassidus we discussed require *emunah*. I took this to mean that they cannot be understood in an apparent and logical manner, unlike logical ideas that can be fully grasped, such as the formula that three times three equals nine. I desired to respond to you in person, but I was distracted and forgot to share my answer with you, so I will suffice with this letter.

My response is that that is precisely the reason we were commanded¹ to have faith in Torah scholars (*emunas chachomim*) and to connect with them, as I will explain.

There is no doubt that although it is possible to understand the wisdom of *kabbalah*, an important prerequisite is required, namely, authentic *yiras shamayim* (*nisht genart*). This is the reason why most people are unable to understand it. Even though every Jew possesses an *emunah* that we have inherited from our ancestors, it does not have the power to inspire a person to conduct himself accordingly, and to leave behind what he can actually understand and enjoy in a tangible way.

This is why we need *emunas chachomim*. It is much easier to acknowledge that whatever claims they make in their field of expertise are true.

Even someone who is extremely knowledgeable can't compare his degree of concentration when he's engaged in studying and *davening* to when he's



***Emunas chachamim* means that what the sages tell us is true without a doubt, although we don't and can't understand it ourselves. This is something we can logically understand.**

involved in business. Certain holy sages, like the [Alter] Rebbe and his son [the Mittlerer Rebbe], retained their wisdom even while conversing with others. People like us, however, can only hope not to forget what we know, but we can't expect to uphold the same level of concentration as while *davening* and learning. So those who are always preoccupied with business certainly can't expect to attain any meaningful understanding in *emunah* themselves.

However, *emunas chachamim* means that what the sages tell us is true without a doubt, although we don't and can't understand it ourselves. This is something we can logically understand.

In fact, we see that our sages are proficient in every known field of wisdom, like the [Alter] Rebbe who excelled in all the sciences, such as astronomy (as evidenced in *hilchos tefilab*² and *bachnasas Shabbos*) and mathematics (as demonstrated in *seder bachnasas Shabbos*).³

REB AIZIL HOMILER

Therefore, logic dictates that we rely on what he says with utter certainty, and presume that he understands it exactly as clear as the formula that three times three equals nine.



From the famous doctor R. Yeshaya of Droy⁴ I have heard about his great knowledge in the field of medicine, and you've heard about how exceptional he was at algebra, and there is so much more. So the Rebbe's knowledge and intelligence are clearly not in doubt.

Therefore, logic dictates that we rely on what he says with utter certainty, and presume that he understands it exactly as clear as the formula that three times three equals nine.

This is especially true since we also recognize the depth of his teachings

when we hear it, even if we aren't capable of understanding it entirely. We therefore certainly can't ignore the words of our sages, and we must disregard the claims of those who negate what they say.

I believe this sufficiently addresses your point, although it could have been explained better had I remembered to address you in person. If you read this letter a few times, I think you'll recognize the truth of my response.

Yitzchak Aizik HaLevi Epshtein



Sunday, 28 Iyar 5606 (1846), Homil

To my dear friend... Reb Tzvi Hirsh Feigin,

I thought my last letter over and I feel the need to make a few amendments.

The doctor R. Yeshaya of Droy (he recently published a medical work in Hebrew) never suggested that the [Alter] Rebbe was himself a doctor in the sense of knowing the names of illnesses and their cures. Rather, when R. Yeshaya

discussed medical ideas with him, the Rebbe would suggest a new theory that would shed light on many of these ideas. This happened to him numerous times.

He also reported that the Rebbe taught him about the various properties in the fluids between the joints, a concept which he derived from *kabbalah* (I have also

heard somewhat about this concept), and R. Yeshaya successfully proved the Rebbe's suggestions in tests.

As to algebra, I did not mean that the [Alter] Rebbe studied it. But an outstanding expert in algebra once visited him to discuss astronomy and mathematics, subjects in which he was famously proficient, as mentioned in my previous letter. The Rebbe took the opportunity and expressed interest in hearing the foundations of algebra. The expert obliged and conveyed a few basic rules.

When he returned the next day, the Rebbe suggested some new theories in algebra and a new algebraic calculation as it pertains to astronomy. When the expert left the Rebbe's room he could not contain himself and exclaimed to those outside: "*Gevald!* I've never encountered a mind like this! With just a few principles that I shared with him he was able to come up overnight with new theories that veterans of the field have never thought of!" All of this is absolutely true. And I don't find it surprising, since I was also witness to the fact that he had incredible mental abilities.

And since he is such a wise man, why should we not accept what he says, even if we don't understand it as clearly as three times three equals nine? He certainly grasps the ideas properly, for

how else can he explain and lay them out so clearly for us?

That's what *emunas chachomim* is about. It's a very rational *emunah*, since it's logical to assume that the explanations he gives are as he says. He is surely not mistaken in his understanding, since it's obvious that his wisdom is greater than that of virtually any other man of the generation. There is therefore no reason



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for our trust in what he tells us to be weakened, and on the contrary, we should strengthen and reinforce our trust in the truth of his words. In fact, we shouldn't even doubt sages of far lesser stature than him, if we see that they truly understand what they're saying.

Although his opponents argue that their claims are logical as well, it is easy to accept *emunas chachomim* here. Someone as smart as he, who literally surrenders his life and energies for the ideas he teaches, without any physical benefit whatsoever, must be completely convinced that what he's saying is true.

His opponents, on the other hand, are "bribed" by bodily pleasure and the removal of the yoke of Heaven. They therefore don't bother to investigate the truth, and they pounce on any slight argument that justifies their way of life

and allows them to follow their desires. It's therefore obvious that even one statement said by this sage should refute much nonsense and religious doubt spouted by his opponents, which deserve to simply be discarded (*shpayt oys*).

And when one's belief in the Rebbe and his teachings is intact—even if he doesn't delve in it and its wisdom but is fully occupied with business and everyday life like any other person—he will merit to connect to Hashem. Chazal say [*Kesubos* 111b]: "Is it really possible (for those distracted with livelihood and other physical matters) to connect to Hashem? Rather, if one connects himself to a *tzadik*, it's as if he has connected himself to the *shechinah*."

This is what I wanted to add to my previous letter.

Yitzchak Aizik HaLevi Epshtein



Erev Shabbos Kodesh, 9 Tammuz 5606 (1846), Homil

To my dear friend... Reb Tzvi Hirsh Feigin,

You are surprised why I spend so much time on the subject of our *chachomim*. As I indicated previously, it's impossible to convey the idea precisely in writing, but I'll explain a bit more now.

While those who oppose Chassidus believe in *kabbalah*, they complain

about the publicity *chassidim* give it, and they believe that it should be kept secret. Although the *kabbalistic* works themselves indicate that close to Moshiach's arrival it will be a *mitzvah* to promote *kabbalah*,⁵ they believe this is only relevant to those individuals who are completely occupied with faith and

But even those who cannot grasp this wisdom as well as they can grasp other subjects should at the very least believe that *kabbalah* is true, and that there is someone who is capable of understanding it like other forms of knowledge. This belief alone hastens the revelation as well.



kabbalistic kavanos, but it does not mean that attempts should be made to explain it in an accessible and orderly way. The vast majority don't believe it's possible to understand *kabbalah* at all, while some believe that only the great early sages, the likes of which are presently non-existent, were able to understand something.

In truth, however, the *mitzvah* to publicize *kabbalah* is definitely to make it understandable, because the Jewish soul has the capacity to comprehend G-dliness. As I've already told you, we possess a special G-dly sense with which we can feel G-dly things, and if one employs the faculties of his soul he can actually feel the existence of G-dly lights, the *sefiros*, and Hashem's singularity, and how these don't pose a contradiction to the simple unity of Hashem.

When Moshiach comes, we will all finally grasp these things, as the *possuk* says,⁶ "all will know Me." This *possuk* is surely referring to the wisdom of *kabbalah*.

According to the philosophers who claim that one can only grasp G-dliness by negating from Him anything that can be grasped by human intellect (*yedi'as heshelilah*), and that the ultimate knowledge is to realize that we will never be able to comprehend Him, than what does the *possuk* mean with "all will **know** Me"? (These scholars explain the *possuk* as referring to knowledge of what Hashem is not, but this is inconsistent with the simple reading of the *possuk*.)

It is therefore a *mitzvah* to publicize these things, since everything that happens Above is triggered by the arousal and *avodah* of man, and the closer we come to understanding it now, the closer we come to the future revelation. (This concept itself requires an entire explanation.)

But even those who cannot grasp this wisdom as well as they can grasp other subjects should at the very least believe that *kabbalah* is true, and that there is someone who is capable of

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Listen my dear friend! Chassidus is not *chas r'shalom* heresy or philosophy, rather it is the true *emunah* which “revives the dead” and “rejuvenates the dry bones” to perceive G dliness.

understanding it like other forms of knowledge. This belief alone hastens the revelation as well. This is what I mean by *emunas chachomim*, to believe that they fully grasp this subject.

This all fully negates two works that have recently been printed which condemn *kabbalah*. These books claim that it was all invented as a means of creating a tumult

among the masses, that no true intellectual believes it to be real, and that anyone who does believe and involve himself in it is simply fooling himself and lacks intellectual thinking.

Emunas chachomim dictates that our heroes are certainly incredibly wise and do not deny intellectual principles. They are in fact proficient in every field, and with regard to *kabbalah* as well, they indeed grasp it and are not fooling themselves.

This undermines those books' point completely. Although I haven't read them myself, based on what I've heard, I think that the above expresses their general argument.

I trust this suffices to address your question.

Yitzchak Aizik HaLevi Epshtein

— The Faith of Chassidus —

In this letter, Reb Aizil writes how Chassidus introduces an added dimension of *emunah* in the absolute unity of Hashem. This *emunah* itself is comprised of two basic levels: simple faith and advanced recognition. He shares his personal struggle to attain these levels, and the experience to actually achieve it.



I read the negative things you wrote about Chassidim and their Rebbe, and, having overcome the pain your words caused, I reminded myself of our old friendship and felt an obligation to write a proper response.

Listen my dear friend! Chassidus is not *chas v'shalom* heresy or philosophy, rather it is the true *emunah* which “revives the dead” and “rejuvenates the dry bones” to perceive G-dliness. All *chassidim*, particularly those of the [Alter] Rebbe, possess this *emunah* and typically experience it during *shemoneh esreh*.

After the prior meditation during *pesukei dezimra* and *krias shema*, they come to feel that everything is really a part of G-d (*altz iz G-t*), and *kelipah's* perspective that our world is a real existence has no impact on his *emunah*. (As opposed to the perspective by *krias shema*, where one sees things from Hashem's point of view and utterly disregards the world, by *shemoneh esreh* one translates Hashem's perspective into his own.⁷) Instead,

the *kelipah* becomes confused and eliminated. This can be accomplished in one of two ways: either through the individual's distress at being distanced from the truth, or by deriving pleasure from G-dliness as one who warms himself near a fire from a distance.

This *emunah* exists by all *chassidim*. People who lack Chassidus, however, even those who aren't vocal, lack this completely except in the most concealed sense, just like the state of the Jews in Mitzrayim. While they also believe in G-d, they do not possess the *emunah* that everything is part of Him (*altz iz G-t*).

This faith exists by all *chassidim*. By some *chassidim*, this *emunah* expressed itself in extreme manner; but the [Alter] Rebbe's meditative approach offers the same thing in a more subtle and refined way. This is expressed either in the manner described above, or through seizing the moment when one feels like the center of existence and replacing it with the sense that everything is part of G-d.

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When the Rebbe concluded, this bright and intense advanced level of *emunah* shot into my heart like an arrow. I was aroused with a desire to run and scream it in the streets, but some rationale, which I now fail to recall, persuaded me not to.

These conflicting emotions represent the genuine feeling of *ratzo vashov* as it exists by the vitality of the *neshamah* and its source Above.

However, this *emunah* is still in a way of *katnus* [a simplistic faith]. This can be compared to an infant who recognizes his father. This simple recognition is the same as the recognition of an adult son; the adult doesn't recognize his father in a more truthful manner than an infant. Yet, an infant doesn't understand the meaning that lies within this recognition (and indeed, there's no need for him to understand it), while an adult is fully capable of understanding the nature of his intrinsic link with his father.

On the other hand, though, this adult insight must first be preceded by the childhood recognition, since he will never comprehend how he originated

from that person if he isn't first aware that that person is his father. This is because isolated logic cannot grasp what fatherhood really is; *gadlus*, an advanced understanding, must ultimately be based on *katnus*, the simple recognition as it existed when he was a child.

Similarly, a mature form of this faith cannot be reached through human reasoning, and instead must be based on pure *emunah*. Only then can *gadlus* be reached, in which the G-dly soul's appreciation for this *emunah* can be enhanced. This *neshamah*-based faith never enters the realm of pure understanding. In fact, anything past the spiritual level of *Adam Kadmon* is beyond our comprehension.

The *gadlus* being discussed here has two ingredients. Consider a bright object with faint, elegant shapes etched on it. These etchings will not be detected if one merely gives it a glance. Noticing them requires concerted effort, and fully appreciating them necessitates eye medication from a good doctor to enhance one's eyesight.

While I think the *nimshal* is obvious, I'm afraid that in today's climate you might take me to be saying that there are shapes Above as well, so I'll spell the two applications of the *mashal* out. One idea is the need for intent focus, and the second is the "eye medication from a good doctor," which corresponds to the precious

The Faith of Chassidus

words of Chassidus recited by the Rebbe. These words enhance the ability of the G-dly soul to have a deep appreciation in this *emunah*, not due to the intellectual quality of the Rebbe's explanations, but because of the raw spiritual energy and light shining forth from his words. This strengthens the ability of the *neshamah* to internalize the *emunah* that everything is part of Hashem—*altz iz G-t*—even at the moment when the world is felt as a separate entity.

Personally, I toiled immensely to acquire this *emunah*. The [Alter] Rebbe planted *katnus* in me with the *maamar* “*v’afu eser nashim*,”⁸ and his son [the Mittlerer Rebbe⁹] helped me begin developing it. However, my “eyesight” was still lacking, and I couldn’t advance by myself. I wanted to have it clearly explained to me, and so I persistently submitted requests

to the [Alter] Rebbe, but he kept pushing me off, which caused me great pain.

Finally, one of my requests proved successful and he promised to say Chassidus for me in private. In the end there were ten people present, including the chossid R. Chatzkel of Droy. What can I tell you; I stood trembling, unaware if it was day or night, and when the Rebbe concluded, this bright and intense advanced level of *emunah* shot into my heart like an arrow. I was aroused with a desire to run and scream it in the streets, but some rationale, which I now fail to recall, persuaded me not to. But that conclusion has stayed with me ever since.

I promise that not one detail of the above is exaggerated...

ENDNOTES

1. *Kesubos* 111b and Rashi. Rambam's *Sefer HaMitzvos*, Asei 6. *Shulchan Aruch* AR 156:4. Rambam *Hilchos Deios* 6:2.
2. 94:2, 117:1.
3. See *Sefer HaSichos* 5705 p. 131 and *HaYom Yom* 7 Shevat regarding the Alter Rebbe's knowledge of astronomy, engineering, and other sciences.
4. For additional information about R. Yeshaya, see *Beis Rebbe* p. 154 and *Yagdil Torah* Vol. 34.
5. Introduction of R' Chaim Vital to *Eitz Chaim*. See also *Tanya Iggeres HaKodesh* Ch. 26.
6. *Yirmiyahu* 31:33
7. Referred to in *kabbalah* as *yichud av*"a and *yichud zu*"n – see *Pri Eitz Chaim* Gate 8 Ch. 7; *Derech Mitzvosecha* 115a and onwards.
8. *Likutei Torah Bechukosai* 48a: “While it would seem that regarding a physical object one cannot say that it is G-dly, in truth it is indeed so, as it says ‘*ein od milvado*.’”
9. The Mittlerer Rebbe was appointed by his father to guide his father's chassidim in matters of Chassidus.



Anecdotes

“HE’S LISTENING!”

During the time-period when the Alter Rebbe said the *maamar* “*Al Shloscha Devarim*,” the Tzemach Tzedek was three years old, and he would pass his time playing in the Alter Rebbe’s room. While the Alter Rebbe would *daven*, little “Reb Mendele,” as he was called by the chassidim, used shoelaces to tie toy *tefillin* made of potatoes on his arm and head. When the Alter Rebbe removed his own *tefillin*, his grandson would remove his too, and playfully drag them around the floor by their shoelaces.

The *maamar* “*Al Shloscha Devarim*” was a particularly difficult *maamar* and the elder chassidim were granted a *chazara*, a review of the *maamar* with the Alter Rebbe in his study. As they waited outside the Rebbe’s study, they watched through a crack that one of the shoelaces of the potato-*tefillin* had got caught up around the leg of the table. The Alter Rebbe bent down and straightened it out, and little

Reb Mendele ran and pranced around the room in delight.

When the Alter Rebbe had taken off his *tefillin* of Rabbeinu Tam, he opened the door and the elder chassidim entered his study. Reb Aizil, who was still a young man, remained standing in his place, afraid to walk inside.

At that moment, however, the Alter Rebbe asked: “Who is left outside?” “A young man,” one of the chassidim answered. “So let him come in, too,” said the Alter Rebbe. “After all, a young *chossid* can grow into an elder *chossid*.”

Reb Aizil related: “I was so overwhelmed that for the first few moments I saw nothing and heard nothing — those words of the Alter Rebbe shone before my eyes and filled my mind and heart. A little time passed before I fully regained my senses, stepped inside, and found a place in the back row.

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“At that moment I felt that the little boy was edging his way between us, perhaps in search of one of his toys. Anxious that he might disturb the proceedings, I looked down and saw that he was clutching his little potatoes and pressing his way forward so that he could hear. Is it possible, I thought, that he actually wants to listen?!”

“And I heard the voice of the Alter Rebbe: ‘He’s listening, he’s listening! You will yet know that he is listening!’

“I was stunned. As soon as I calmed down, while still inside, I was vigilant about each thought I had, for I had clearly seen that the Alter Rebbe saw every individual’s thoughts.”¹

FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS

The Alter Rebbe instituted that every *chassidische* shul complete the entire *Shas* annually by dividing it amongst themselves. The custom developed to complete it and divide it anew each year on *Yud-Tes Kislev*.

At the *Yud-Tes Kislev farbrengen* in Homil, Reb Aizil would ask each participant to confirm that he had learned the *mesechta* which he had been assigned the previous year. One year, he reached a certain *mesechta* and when the assignee replied that he learnt his *mesechta* Reb Aizil was not satisfied.

“The whole *mesechta*?” Reb Aizil inquired.
“Yes,” the man replied.

“This year?” Reb Aizil pried further. Now the *chossid* stammered, “Last year, some days before *Yud-Tes Kislev*, when I had already made up my mind which *mesechta* I wanted to undertake, I began learning it in advance.”

Hearing this, Reb Aizil immediately divided the first few pages of the *mesechta* among those present, to be learned on the spot. He explained that the Alter Rebbe writes in Tanya that the entire *Shas* should be completed “each and every year” and therefore it had to be learned in the course of that year.²

WHOSE GAIN?

At a *Yud-Tes Kislev farbrengen* Reb Aizil once posed the following question: “Who was granted a salvation on *Yud-Tes Kislev*? The Alter Rebbe? – For him it

made no difference where he was. Even in the rigors of Tainy Soviet he lacked nothing. Did someone say that he didn’t have Shabbos clothes to change into? –

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Even that he was not lacking, because he had a handkerchief, and every Friday afternoon he would tear off two tiny strips with which to keep his socks up, so you see that each week he had new garters in honor of Shabbos.

“Who then was granted a salvation on *Yud-Tes Kislev*? – it was the Almighty

who was granted a salvation - *laHashem hayeshua*, because through the Alter Rebbe’s release the light of G-dliness has been revealed and disseminated far and wide in this world! Let us then dance together...” And at that, the chassidim went off in a lively dance.³

HUMBLE GROWTH

Reb Eizil Homiler once fasted for forty days to elevate himself. Yet each day, shortly before the end of the day, he sipped a small amount of water, so that

the day would not reckon as a fast-day. This way he did not derive the satisfaction and pride that comes from fasting for forty days.⁴

SENSITIVITY

An unlearned wagon driver, who would drive people from Homil to Paritch, once approached Reb Aizil with a *shaila*, “I am a *koben*; am I allowed to take a divorcee?” (He obviously knew that a *koben* may not “take” a divorcee for marriage, but he was concerned that he may be prohibited from taking such a woman in his wagon as well). Reb Aizil went over to the bookcase and pulled out a *Smeh*, read inside for fifteen minutes, and then turned to the

man and said, “Where? To Paritch? Yes, you may.”

The Frierdiker Rebbe said, “Fifteen minutes was a lot for Reb Aizil, since during that time, he could have been contemplating profound ideas of *Chassidus*. But since one may not laugh at an ignoramus who asks a *shaila* to avoid causing him to stumble on another occasion, Reb Aizil disregarded his own time.”⁵

IN THE WORLD OF THOUGHT

In his later years, Reb Aizil would not easily agree to recite *Chassidus*. Listeners

would have to beg him repeatedly before he would submit. He would excuse himself

saying that it was now more difficult for him to share what was on his mind.

In the final year of his life, Reb Aizil refused outright and said, "I am unable to articulate that which I am thinking, and just to speak concepts [in which I am not engrossed] I am incapable."⁶

HOW MUCH IS CHASSIDUS WORTH?

A *chossid* once approached Reb Aizil and asked him to recite for him *Chassidus*, saying that it was a matter of life and death for him.

Reb Aizil replied, "Reciting *Chassidus* 'costs' me fifty ruble. Now, if I came and asked you for fifty ruble, would you just give it to me?" The man was quiet and the conversation continued on to other matters.

At the end of their conversation Reb Aizil said to the man, "Look at how you lied to me. If *Chassidus* truly mattered to you, would you have let me get away?"⁷

A GOLDEN SHOVEL

A *yid* once came to Reb Aizil and asked him to teach him *Chassidus* since he had heard that *Chassidus* is a *segula* to counter *machshavos zaros* (unwelcome thoughts).

Reb Aizil replied with a *mashal*:



When the Alter Rebbe had taken off his *tefillin* of Rabbeinu Tam, he opened the door and the elder chassidim entered his study. Reb Aizil, who was still a young man, remained standing in his place, afraid to walk inside.

"The king's treasure houses contain a collection of all sorts of vessels made of pure gold, even a manure shovel. Now, if

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“The true ‘*mizrach*’ is at the back of the *shul*, where the *melamdin* sit. You should listen and learn from the words of the *melamdin* just as you listen and learn from the Rebbe’s words.”

someone tried to take that gold shovel to clear away manure, he will be the subject of immense ridicule.

“The same is true of *Chassidus*. To use it against *machshavos zaros* is like to use the king’s golden shovel for manure. It works, but is that what it is for? *Chassidus* is far beyond that!”⁸

THE TRUE MIZRACH

One day, during his early years in Homil, Reb Aizil Homiler *farbrenge*d with the local *baalei batim* and told them: “The true ‘*mizrach*’ is at the **back** of the *shul*, where the *melamdin* sit. You should listen and learn from the words of the *melamdin* just as you listen and learn from the Rebbe’s words.”

From that day on, the *baalei batim* began to appreciate the *chassidishe melamdin*, and the town of Homil became bright.

When the Frierdiker Rebbe related the above, he added: “In the past, people would study not only the words of a Rebbe but the words of a *chossid*. The young people would listen to the old folk, the *baalei batim* would listen to the *melamdin* – and things were brighter.”⁹

LABOR OF LOVE

Each year before Chanukah, the esteemed *gaon* and *chossid* Reb Aizil Homlier, would personally clean and

shine the Menorah. Such was his love and endearment for this *mitzvah*.¹⁰

MAKE IT YOUR BUSINESS

Reb Aizil Homiler once came to Chernigov, and the local *chasidim* prepared a festive

meal in his honor. During the meal, Reb Aizil repeated a *maamar* of *Chassidus* and



as soon as he was done the students of *Chassidus* (the *maskilim*) left to review his teachings. The *baalei batim* on the other hand continued with the meal.

One of the *balei batim* then turned to Reb Aizil and said, “We all heard your teachings of *Chassidus*, understood them and will review them when we get home. Why do these *maskilim* rush out to review the *maamar* right away?”

Suddenly, the bell of the post office next door rang. The manager of the post office quickly got up and ran out to see what was the matter. Reb Aizil turned to the questioner and said, “You see, we all heard the bell, but only the post office manager cared about it because it’s his livelihood. So too with these Chassidim, since *Chassidus* is their life, they care about it and hurry to review it immediately.”¹¹

A JOURNEY TO LUBAVITCH

From the memories of Reb Avraham Ber Yirmiyah’s of his journey from Homil to Lubavitch as a child:

I shall never forget my first journey to Lubavitch. The weeks following Pesach of 5592 (1832) were filled with excitement and joyous anticipation. I was six-years-old at the time, and I had

just been told that father planned to take me along on his annual Shavuot trip to Lubavitch. I was scheduled to soon begin my studies at the *cheder* and father wanted me to receive the Rebbe’s *brachos* for success in my studies.

On a Sunday morning, mother woke me early and told me to hurry and dress.

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With a special joy she packed the new suit which she had sewn for me, warning me to wear it only on Shabbos and on the evening that I would merit to enter into the Rebbe's room. We then set out for the home of Reb Aizil, the *rov* of my hometown Homil, from where we would depart on the holy journey to Lubavitch. Despite the early hour, Reb Aizil's street was as crowded and noisy as on market day. The *rov's* courtyard was jammed with men, women and children, some excitedly talking in groups, others dancing. Four wagons stood by at the ready.

To enter the *rov's* home is impossible--the house is crammed with people--and mother cannot locate father. We are told that Reb Aizil had delivered *maamar* after *maamar* throughout the night, and that at first light those present *davened shachris*. Now, the *talmidei chachomim* and wealthy businessmen of Homil have arrived to see their *rov* off on his journey.

A short while later we hear the sound of singing. Suddenly, people begin to pour from the doorway and windows of the *rov's* house, their backs to the yard and facing the house, singing and dancing all the while. A wave of holy trepidation passes through those waiting in the yard. Soon Reb Aizil appears in the doorway. He blesses the crowd with words of parting and climbs on to the wagon.

Mother sees father climbing on to the wagon after the rabbi, and calls out: "Yermiah! Yermiah! Take Avraham Berl! Don't forget Avraham Berkeh!" But her voice is drowned out by the commotion. Seeing that father has forgotten me I start to cry. The wagon in which Reb Aizil and father are sitting is already moving.

The entire crowd bursts into song and begins to follow the wagon out of town. In the meantime, mother has located Reb Yisroel Aharon the *melamed* and has told him that father has forgotten me, and that she has called out to him but was not heard. Reb Yisroel Aharon lifts me into his arms and, forcing a path through the crowd, brings me to father's wagon.¹²

SOURCES

1. *Likkutei Dibburim* Vol. 4 p. 1330, 1335-1336.
2. *LeSheima Ozen* p. 181.
3. *Sefer Hatoldos Admur Hazaken* Vol. 3 p. 810.
4. *Shemuos VeSipurim* Vol. 3 p. 228.
5. *Sefer HaShichos* 5684 p. 53.
6. *LeSheima Ozen* p. 170, 184.
7. *Shemuos VeSipurim* Vol. 2 p. 155.
8. *Shemuos VeSipurim* Vol. 1 p. 225.
9. *Sefer HaShichos* 5704 p. 96.
10. *Likkutei Sipurim* (Perlov) p. 473.
11. *Shemuos VeSipurim* Vol. 2 p. 172.
12. *HaTomim* Vol. 1 p. 214 (SIE)

Maxims

We have no idea how to love a *yid*. What is a *yid*? A *neshama*, filled with *emuna*, and attached to *Torah* and *mitzvos*. How can one not love these things?



After learning several pages of Gemara he would immediately review them, and he explained, "For someone who anyways learns all the time, what should his *Iskafya* be? To review what he has learned."



Reb Aizil once overheard two of his students beginning a new *mesechta*. Reb Aizil called them over and rebuked them for not having made a *siyum* over the last *mesechta* that they finished. "It shows that you don't hold the Torah dear," he said.



"Remember everything *Amalek* did to you."

Amalek, representing coldness and apathy to *kedusha*, can attack a person who keeps to himself ("to you"). By engaging in brotherly encouragement with fellow *chassidim* one protects himself from *Amalek*.



"For You hear the prayers of all mouths (*Shmone Esrei*, *Shma Koleinu*)."

Even a *tefilah* that is recited without concentration and only passes through the mouth, we beseech Hashem to accept it as well.





Rebbe

A Glimpse from **UP-CLOSE**

Reb Yoel Kahn



— Accuracy and Precision —

QUOTING FROM MEMORY

The Rebbe's outstanding memory in all parts of Torah is well-known and needs no proof. One need just flip through a volume of Likkutei Sichos and see the thousands of references over a wide range of topics to appreciate the extensiveness of the Rebbe's Torah knowledge.

Nevertheless, as part of my work to review and transcribe the Rebbe's *sichos*, I had the chance to catch a glimpse of his amazing memory from up close.

For example, after a certain *sicha* was given to the Rebbe for editing, the Rebbe added a number of lines from the *sefer* Resisei Layla from R. Tzaddok HaKohen of Lublin. Since he didn't have the actual *sefer* at hand, the Rebbe asked that the quote be checked for accuracy before the *sicha* was printed. We visited the Rebbe's library and checked up the quote in the *sefer*. Aside for a word or two, we discovered that the entire citation was accurate! (The quote is printed in Likkutei Sichos Vol. 5 p. 86.)

Now, the *sefer* Resisei Layla was written relatively recently (the author passed away in 5660 [1900]), yet the Rebbe was familiar with its content word for word! Besides for demonstrating the Rebbe's outstanding memory, perhaps this indicates the high regard the Rebbe had for the *sefer* and its author.

A similar incident took place not long after the Rebbe accepted the *nesius* in 5711 (1951). At that time, we began compiling and publishing the *sichos* said by the Rebbe during the previous year (the year of mourning for the Frieddiker Rebbe), and a number of these *sichos* were edited by the Rebbe.

One time, after the Rebbe finished editing a certain *sicha*, Rabbi Chodakov gave me the *sicha* to prepare for printing. As I glanced at the sheets, I noticed a reference written by the Rebbe to Sefer Chassidim section 1129. Curiously, the Rebbe had added a line over the number of the *siman* (תתשכט).

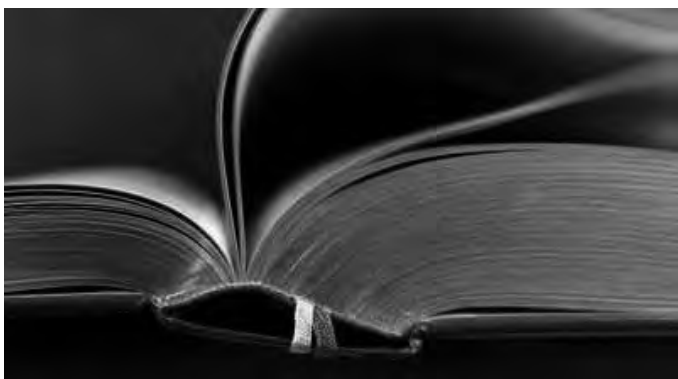


REB YOEL KAHN served as the chief teacher and disseminator of the Rebbe's teachings for over forty years. Besides his breadth of knowledge, Reb Yoel is considered by many to be the most profound scholar of Chassidus in our generation.

In this article, Reb Yoel shares several personal experiences in which he merited to be involved. Although ordinary people cannot fully appreciate the true greatness of a tzaddik, benefit may be derived from appreciating whatever we can.

Translated by Rabbi Yebuda Leib Altein.

A GLIMPSE FROM UP-CLOSE



On one hand, in order to be able to pinpoint the distinct theme of numerous arguments, one must possess a broad knowledge of Shas and be familiar with many sugyos.

I was baffled. What was the meaning of the line, and how was I to continue? I couldn't ask the Rebbe himself as he had already left 770, so I entered Rabbi Chodakov's office and asked him what to do. Rabbi Chodakov looked at the page and was similarly puzzled.

As we were speaking, the telephone rang and I left the room. A few minutes later, Rabbi Chodakov called me back and told me that the Rebbe had been on the line. The Rebbe had asked him to tell me that the reference marked with a line was correct. The reason he had added the line was because the *sefer* was not in his room at the time and the reference had

been written from memory. He hadn't wanted to rely on his memory alone, so he had marked the reference to indicate that it should not be printed until it was verified. When he returned home, he had checked the actual *sefer* and saw that the reference was indeed accurate. (The reference is printed in Likkutei Sichos Vol. 2 p. 511.)

IN-DEPTH COMPARISON

By a certain *farbrengen*, the Rebbe made a *hadran*, a dissertation on the completion of the entire Shas. The theme of the *hadran* was to explain how Beis Shamai and Beis Hilel follow a common logic in their arguments throughout Shas: Beis Shamai give primary importance to the *potential* state of an entity, while Beis Hilel view its *actual* state as being the deciding factor.

For example: Beis Shamai hold that one should light eight candles on the first day of Chanukah and continue to decrease, while Beis Hilel rule that one should start with one candle and continue to increase (Shabbos 21b). Beis Shamai's logic is that the number of candles should correspond

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to the *incoming* days—i.e., the days that exist *potentially*, eight days on day one, seven days on day two, and so on—while Beis Hilel hold that their number should equal the number of *outgoing* days, i.e., the days that have *actually* passed.

The Rebbe brought a number of additional examples where this idea is the underlying theme behind the arguments of Beis Shamai and Beis Hilel. By certain examples this theme can be seen easily, while by others the connection is not visible at first glance, and one must analyze the case to see how it applies.

The idea to explain the arguments of Beis Shamai and Beis Hilel in such a manner was not the Rebbe's novelty; it can be found in earlier sources (such as in the works of R. Yosef Engel and R. Shlomo Yosef Zevin). However, the Rebbe expounded on the topic with great depth and clarity, and he also explained why this theme is repeated by numerous arguments, and why presenting their views once was not enough.

As the Rebbe was saying this *sicha*, I was waiting for him to mention what is perhaps one of the most apparent examples: the argument of Beis Shamai and Beis Hilel regarding the use of a safeguarded item (a *pikadon*). Beis Shamai hold that even one who merely *considers* using the item is held liable, while Beis Hilel say that one is only liable if he *actually* uses it (Bava

Metzia 43b). This seems to be a classic example of Beis Shamai focusing on the potential (the intent) and Beis Hilel, on the actual (the action). Yet the Rebbe did not mention this argument at all. (Parenthetically, I later saw that R. Yosef Engel does cite this example.)

Shortly after the *farbrengen*, I wrote a note with the question and gave it in to the Rebbe.

The Rebbe answered with a short note (later printed in Likkutei Sichos Vol. 6 p. 70) explaining how this argument is not related to this theme. The Rebbe explained that it is impossible to say that merely *considering* to steal an item is enough to make a person liable as if he actually removed the item and brought it to his domain. A person's thoughts can only affect something already in his possession, but they cannot affect an item that belongs to another. In order to be liable for stealing an object, the thief must *actually* remove it from the owner's possession.

We must say that in this case, Beis Shamai's reasoning is something else entirely. As the Rogatchover explains, although the *pikadon* remained in its owner's possession until that point, the *shemirah* ends as soon as the guardian considers taking it, and the item is *automatically* now found in his possession. The decision to use the item

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constitutes an *actual* transfer of the item to his domain.

The Rebbe proves this from a Yerushalmi (Shavuos 8:1). The Yerushalmi says that Beis Shamai agree that he is not liable if the object was found in a public domain. If the reasoning of Beis Shamai is that *considering* to steal is like actual stealing, what difference does it make where the item was found? We must say that the argument here revolves around something else entirely—whether or not a conceptual transfer is effective in bringing the item to the guardian's possession.

This reply can show us what true brilliance means. On one hand, in order to be able to pinpoint the distinct theme of numerous arguments, one must

possess a broad knowledge of Shas and be familiar with many *sugyos*. On the other hand, the Rebbe didn't merely connect cases that appear to be similar at first glance. The Rebbe grasped each case properly and thoroughly. When one has a good understanding of the underlying logic of each case, one sees that cases that first seem unrelated may really be related, while cases that first appeared similar may not be similar at all.

It's interesting to note that from all the *gedolei yisrael* who explained the arguments of Beis Shamai and Beis Hilel as being based on the theme of potential versus actuality, the Rebbe is the only one who explains why the arguments are repeated more than once and what each case adds over the others. This further



demonstrates that the Rebbe's grasp of the cases was not superficial; he truly understood how each case is based on this idea and was therefore able to see the difference between each individual case.

A DIFFERENCE OF A LETTER

Another thing I noticed while working on the Rebbe's *sichos* and *maamorim* was the care the Rebbe gave to each word, and even to each letter.

Take the following example. Chassidus explains that the reason Hashem made the system of *bishtalsbelus*, creating each level as a continuation of the previous level, was to allow us to have some type of understanding of the creation of the world. (Even now, the creation of the world is *yesh mei'ayin*—a wonder that cannot be understood, but the system of *bishtalsbelus* allows for at least some type of logical analysis.)

The Rebbe mentioned this idea in the *maamar* HaChodesh HaZeh Lachem 5747 (printed in Sefer HaMaamorim Melukat 3 p. 113). When preparing the *maamar* for editing, I wrote that the reason Hashem made the system of *bishtalsbelus* was because Hashem limited Himself, so to speak, in order for there to be room in intellect (מקום בשכל) to understand creation.

When the Rebbe edited the pages of the *maamar*, the Rebbe changed one letter in this line: instead of *מקום בשכל*, it now read *מקום לשכל*—room *for* intellect.

This single letter changes the meaning of the entire sentence. *בשכל* means that intellect already exists, and *seder bishtalsbelus* gives room for this pre-existing intellect to have some type of understanding. But *לשכל* means something else entirely: without *seder bishtalsbelus*, not only would there be no room for an understanding of creation in intellect, but there would be no room for the existence of intellect at all!

I'm not going to go now into a lengthy explanation of this idea, but this serves as an example of the precision of the Rebbe's words and the depth that can be found in even a single letter. This small change made a difference in the entire picture and added a whole new perspective to the topic.

NOT JUST A L'CHAIM

In the earlier years the Rebbe would eat the Yom Tov meals in the Friediker Rebbe's apartment on the second floor of 770. When the Rebbe would drink wine during these meals, he would say "l'chaim" to those present.

Once, by the first Pesach *seder*, the Rebbe drank a bit of wine during *shulchan orech* to separate between the fish and the meat,

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but he did not say *l'chaim*. The next day, by the daytime meal, the Rebbe drank some wine again after the fish, and this time he said *l'chaim*. That night, by the second *seder*, the Rebbe again drank wine but did not say *l'chaim*.

R. Shmuel Levitin, who was present at the *seder*, noticed the difference and asked the Rebbe for the reason behind it.

The Rebbe told him that saying *l'chaim* when drinking wine gives it importance, and at the *seder* night one should not give importance to any wine other than the *arba kosos*.

This gives us an idea of how careful the Rebbe was in his conduct. There is certainly no *halachic* issue with saying *l'chaim* over wine during *shulchan orech*, yet the Rebbe didn't want to give importance to any wine that wasn't part of the *arba kosos*!

Additionally, this shows us how the Rebbe viewed *minhagei yisrael*. Since *yidden* are accustomed to saying *l'chaim* over wine, this itself gives it importance. It's not just a simple drink of wine anymore; it's a *l'chaim*, and the drink is significant enough to be an "addition" to the *arba kosos*.

PRECISION IN EVERY MOVE

In 5721 (1961), Shavuos fell out on Sunday and Monday. On Shabbos (*erev* Shavuos) I hosted a *yid* from *eretz yisrael*, and during the Friday night meal he mentioned that he had recently visited Japan. I realized that this meant he had crossed the International Date Line during *sefirah*, which created a problem regarding the day he was supposed to keep as Shavuos.

At a Shavuos *farbrengen* a few years earlier, the Rebbe spoke about this topic, and he explained that *sefiras ha'omer* is a *mitzva* for each individual and is not dependent on the *sefirah* of those around him. If so, someone who crossed the Date Line during *sefirah* should continue counting based on where he himself is holding, disregarding the fact that everyone else is holding one day earlier or later.

This will have an effect on when he should keep Shavuos as well. Shavuos is not connected to a certain day of the month but to the fiftieth day of *sefiras ha'omer*. Since this person will reach the fiftieth day one day earlier or later than everyone else in his location, his Yom Tov will be kept on a different date than theirs.

Although the Rebbe didn't arrive at a *halachic* conclusion, it was quite clear that he understood this approach as



being correct. This would mean that the guest was supposed to keep Shavuot that very day, on Shabbos (and he would not observe a second day on Sunday, because as a resident of Eretz Yisrael, his Yom Tov was only for one day).

I explained this all to the guest, and I told him that he should *daven* Maariv again, this time saying the *tefilah* of Yom Tov with the additions for Shabbos, and repeat *kiddush* as it should be said on Yom Tov. However, since at that time the

This shows us how the Rebbe viewed *minhagei yisrael*. Since *yidden* are accustomed to saying *lechaim* over wine, this itself gives it importance. It's not just a simple drink of wine anymore; it's a *lechaim*...

Rebbe's opinion on this matter was not completely clear, I told him that it would be a good idea to hear the Rebbe's view from him directly. I suggested that the next day after *musaf*, when the Rebbe would pass through the crowd on his way out of *shul* and wish everyone "*Gut*

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Without a moment's hesitation, the Rebbe said to him, "*Gut Shabbos, Gut Yom Tov.*"

Shabbos," he should tell the Rebbe a few short words: "I was in Japan."

The next day, we both stood along the pathway the Rebbe would walk through on his way out of *shul*. The Rebbe greeted everyone with the regular "*Gut Shabbos*," and when the Rebbe passed by, the guest said, "I was in Japan." Without a moment's hesitation, the Rebbe said to him, "*Gut Shabbos, Gut Yom Tov.*"

The Rebbe continued walking, and then he turned around and added, "[May you have] a joyous *kabbolas haTorah*."

I explained to my guest that he had just received a clear *psak din* from the Rebbe that today was his Shavuos!

However, I still wondered why the Rebbe had wished him a joyous *kabbolas haTorah*. True, the Yom Tov of Shavuos followed his personal *sefrach*, but that didn't mean that it was the day the Torah was given. The Alter Rebbe writes in Shulchan Aruch (494:1) that at the time when Yomim Tovim were instituted based on witnesses who had seen the new moon and Shavuos could fall out on

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the fifth or seventh of Sivan, one would not say “*zman matan toraseinu*” when *davening* unless Shavuos fell out on the sixth of Sivan, the day the Torah was given. (Nowadays, Shavuos always falls out on the sixth of Sivan, and we always say “*zman matan toraseinu*” on Shavuos; but in those days this was not necessarily the case.)

It thus follows that even though this *yid* was celebrating Shavuos on the fifth of Sivan, it still wasn't the day of *kabbolas haTorah* for him. Why did the Rebbe wish him a joyous *kabbolas haTorah*?

That night, after Maariv, I was told by the *mazkirus* that the Rebbe wanted to speak to me. I entered the Rebbe's room, and the Rebbe asked me if that *yid* was staying by me. I replied that he was.

The Rebbe said that the *yid* should be told how to conduct himself that night and the following day. He should *daven* the weekday Maariv and make *havdalah* as on a regular Motza'ei Shabbos, with the exception that he should not bring his fingers to the flame by the *brachah* of *borei me'orei ha'eish* (because he was being hosted by people who were keeping Yom Tov). The next day, he was to put on *tefillin*.

I asked the Rebbe if he should make a *brachah* on the *tefillin*.

The Rebbe responded with a smile: “In my understanding according to *halachah*

he must put on *tefillin*. If so, this means that Hashem has commanded him to do so, and he must say ‘*asher kideshanu bemitzvosav*.’”

I then asked if the man should have said “*zman matan toraseinu*” on Shabbos.

The Rebbe answered, “There is a ruling in the Alter Rebbe's Shulchan Aruch [regarding this].” The Rebbe was referring to the *halachah* mentioned above, that these words are only said on the sixth of Sivan.

This made my question even stronger. Why had the Rebbe wished him a joyous *kabbolas haTorah*?

As usual, the Rebbe *farbrenge*d on the evening of the second day of Shavuos. During one of the *sichos*, the Rebbe said that the spiritual revelation of the Torah on Shavuos consists of two aspects: the revelation of the Torah that is connected with the sixth of Sivan, and the revelation that is the result of the preparation during the forty-nine days of *sefiras ha'omer*.

Chassidus explains that through the *avoda* during the forty-nine days of *sefiras ha'omer*, one draws down a revelation of *elokus* that is proportionate to the individual's efforts. This is then followed by the revelation of the Torah on Shavuos, which is a revelation that is entirely beyond a person's *avoda*.

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However, in this *sicha* the Rebbe explained that this higher level itself is comprised of two aspects:

One level is not dependent on a person's *avoda* at all and is revealed to all *yidden* equally, irrespective of where he is holding in his personal preparation for *kabbolas haTorah*. This level is revealed on the sixth of Sivan and is the reason we say “*zman matan toraseinu*” on Shavuot.

The second level is somewhat dependent on a person's *avoda* and is revealed after he completes his personal preparation for *kabbolas haTorah* through the *avoda* of *sefiras ha'omer*.

(The *sicha* was later printed in Likkutei Sichos Vol. 3 pp. 995–1001 and fn. 23.)

Hearing the *sicha*, I received the answer to my question. The Rebbe had wished

the person a joyous *kabbolas haTorah* because a certain aspect of *kabbolas haTorah* takes place on an individual basis, when he has completed his personal *avoda* of *sefiras ha'omer*.

This also explained why the Rebbe divided his greeting into two. First, the Rebbe wished him “*Gut Shabbos, gut Yom Tov*” without mentioning *kabbolas haTorah*, because the fifth of Sivan is not the day of Matan Torah, and *halachah* rules that one should not say “*zman matan toraseinu*.” Then, as a separate greeting, the Rebbe wished him a joyous *kabbolas haTorah*, because on a spiritual level a certain aspect of *kabbolas haTorah* existed on that day as well.

This story serves as an example of the extraordinary precision of the Rebbe's conduct, both according to *halachah* and in the spiritual realm.

— Elevation and Positivity —

A MILLION DOLLARS AND FIVE CENTS

The Rebbe's general approach, as expressed in many different areas, was to elevate and focus on the positive. When one rises above, the negative disappears on its own.

This attitude is expressed in the following anecdote:

In the early years, the Rebbe would return home from 770 by foot, accompanied by Rabbi Chodakov. During those nights when the Rebbe would receive people for *yechidus*, Rabbi Chodakov would wait in his office until everyone had

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finished entering for *yechidus* and would accompany the Rebbe home.

One day, Rabbi Chodakov called me and told me that when he had accompanied the Rebbe home the night before, the Rebbe had repeated a conversation with an individual at *yechidus* to him. The Rebbe added that it would be fitting for the conversation to be transcribed and he would then edit it. (Even though these answers had been given to a private individual, the Rebbe wanted them to

be publicized since their content was of a general nature.) Rabbi Chodakov repeated the conversation to me, I wrote it down, and he gave it in to the Rebbe for editing. (The *yechidus* was later printed in *Toras Menachem* 5716 Vol. 1 pp. 203–4.)

The content of the *yechidus* was as follows:

The individual complained that whenever he does something positive he has all sorts of ulterior motives and he asked

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Over twenty *chassanim* had passed by together, and the Rebbe only mentioned the letter to this specific *chassan*!

the Rebbe how he could get himself to do those things for altruistic reasons.

The Rebbe answered by way of a *mashal*. Suppose a person enters a deal in which he has the potential to earn a million-dollar profit, and on the side, he will also earn another five cents. Of course, the only thing on that person's mind is the million dollars, and the five cents are of no significance to him.

The same is true in *avodas Hashem*. When a person does a *mitzva* he connects to Hashem. When he reflects on the greatness of what's being accomplished when he does a *mitzva*—he, a limited human being, is connecting to Hashem, the infinite Creator—everything else will pale in comparison, and his personal

motives will be of no significance.

The Rebbe's attitude to focus on the positive applied to general matters as well. For example, in the tense days preceding the Six Day War, when the Jewish nation in Eretz Yisrael was in grave danger, it was possible to adopt an approach of "*sur mera*," to decree fast days and arouse *yidden* to *teshuvah*. While this approach is important as well, the Rebbe focused on *asei tov*, to uplift the Jewish nation and strengthen their connection to Hashem.

The Rebbe launched *mitzva tefillin* and asked that as many *yidden* as possible be approached and assisted to put on *tefillin*, quoting the statement of *Chazal* that wearing *tefillin* instills fear in our enemies and brings success in war.

POSITIVE INFLUENCE

I heard the following story from R. Berel Baumgarten, the late *shliach* to Argentina:

R. Baumgarten once became acquainted with a young man who fell in love with a non-Jewish girl. After explaining to him at length the severity of the issue, R. Baumgarten succeeded in convincing him to arrange that she convert, and

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she underwent a proper conversion. However, he then discovered that the man was a *kohen* and was not allowed to marry a convert. Everyone tried to explain to him how terrible it was to desecrate the holiness of *kehuna*, but to no avail. Nothing was going to change his decision.

R. Baumgarten arranged a *yechidus* for the young man with the Rebbe, and he agreed to hear what the Rebbe would have to say.

The Rebbe said to him:

"I'm sure you have heard that people say I'm a great scholar, and there are people who are still more knowledgeable than me. Yet, the greatest man—someone who worked on improving himself his entire life—cannot possibly achieve the holiness of a *kohen*, if he was not born as one. *Kehuna* is a sanctity that Hashem gives from above, and a person can never reach it with his own efforts. And you are privileged to have been given this tremendous gift."

After the *yechidus*, the man said to himself, "If the sanctity of *kehuna* is so great, I don't want to desecrate it. I will not marry the girl!"

The Rebbe didn't explain to him the severity of the act or the punishment he would receive; he elevated him to a higher state, and the negativity disappeared on its own.

It's important to point out that the reason the Rebbe was able to influence this young man was not only because he focused on the positive. While this itself can influence a person much more than focusing on the negative, there was more to it. *Chazal* tell us that words that come from the heart enter the heart. The Rebbe cared for the man; he truly desired what was best for him, and his decision to marry the girl touched the depths of his *neshamah*. The man sensed that the Rebbe was speaking from the heart, not just from the brain, and the Rebbe's words made their way into his heart as well and influenced him to change his plans.

ONE HUNDRED PERCENT TO EACH PERSON

In the later years, the *mazkirus* would arrange that on Sundays groups of *chassanim*, *bar mitzva* boys, and so on, would pass by the Rebbe together, and the Rebbe would give each one a dollar and a blessing for *berachah vebatzlachah*.

I heard the following incident from a reliable person who I personally trust:

Once, when a group of *chassanim* passed by the Rebbe, the Rebbe asked a certain *chassan*: "Have you already received the letter? I already signed it."

The Rebbe was referring to the letter that would be sent out to the *chassan* and *kallah* with his blessings for the wedding.

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The person who told me this story, who was present at the time and heard the Rebbe's words, was curious to know the reason for this unusual remark. Over twenty *chassanim* had passed by together, and the Rebbe only mentioned the letter to this specific *chassan*!

The observer investigated into the story and discovered that a few days earlier, a group of *chassanim* were sitting together and discussing the letters the Rebbe would send to each *chassan* for his *chassunah*. Although the text of the letter was the same for each *chassan*, many *chassanim* maintained that the Rebbe gave his personal *brachah* to each individual *chassan*. Any person with depth doesn't do things in a superficial manner; all the more so a *tzaddik*, who puts his entire essence into every action.

However, some *chassanim* claimed that the Rebbe doesn't put his full attention into the letters, and he merely goes through them quickly. One *chassan* went so far as to say that since the Rebbe is extremely busy, perhaps he doesn't even read the name of the *chassan* at the top of the letter, and he just signs it and continues to the next one.

It was to this *chassan* that the Rebbe asked: "Have you already received the letter? I already signed it"!

I personally heard this story from the person who investigated and found out what was behind the Rebbe's remark.

A while later I related this story at a *farbrengen*, and I added that I know the person who related the story to be an honest individual who doesn't exaggerate, and I believe the story to be true.

After the *farbrengen*, someone approached me and said: "You say that the story is true because you heard it from a trustworthy person, but I know for a fact that the story is one hundred percent true. You see, I am that very *chassan*..."

From this story we can see the seriousness and full attention the Rebbe gave to each individual person, and how he invested his entire heart and soul even into the seemingly standard *brachos* he gave.

(Additionally, we see how the Rebbe devoted his time and energy even toward an individual such as this *chassan*, who was able to entertain such thoughts about the Rebbe: not only did he sign his letter and give him a dollar, but he elevated him and ensured that he appreciates the Rebbe's *brachah*.)



“No, what the Rebbe said made a lot of sense,” he answered. “But I am never coming back again.”

———— To Love Every Jew ————

A WEEK AFTER A HEART ATTACK

It's hard for us to imagine how much the Rebbe cared for every *yid*.

Someone once showed me a letter in the Rebbe's handwriting dated Rosh Chodesh MarCheshvan 5738. Just one week earlier, on Shmini Atzeres, the Rebbe suffered a major heart attack. In this letter, the Rebbe writes to a boy who would soon be turning *bar mitzva*. After giving him his blessings, the Rebbe replied to what the boy had written in his letter, that he came from a non-religious family.

The Rebbe explained that the state of being non-religious is just an exterior shell that conceals the essence of a Jew. Every Jew is a descendant of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, and of Sarah, Rivkah, Rochel, and Leah, and this boy was preceded by tens of generations of Torah-true Jews. Being non-religious is merely an external covering that conceals his true identity.

In the original letter you can see how the Rebbe made corrections and added and erased words. Just a few days after suffering a major heart attack, the Rebbe devoted his energy to encouraging a

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young boy, so that he shouldn't feel dejected from the fact that he was born to a "non-religious" family!

A TZADDIK GAMUR LOVES EVEN A RASHA GAMUR

Many years ago, in 5733, a certain young man spent some time in Crown Heights. This man was drawn toward the founder of Christianity, *rachama litzlan*.

The man started coming closer to *yiddishkeit*, but after a while he decided to leave Crown Heights. Why? Because of the negative manner in which people viewed the man he admired!

He wrote a letter in English to the Rebbe, thanking him for the warm treatment he was shown, but explaining that he couldn't stay in Crown Heights any longer. This took place toward the end of Adar.

The Rebbe answered as follows:

"This [decision] is not correct at all, and it is certainly not the will of Hashem. You should stay here at least until after the coming Tishrei so that we can celebrate all three Yomim Tovim [of Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot] together, (as well as my birthday,) including Simchas Torah." (A picture of the letter and the Rebbe's handwritten reply can be found in Igros Kodesh Vol. 28 p. 18.)

Can you imagine?! We're talking about a person who is on such a low level that the negative attitude to the founder of Christianity bothers him to the extent that he feels he can't remain in the neighborhood, yet the Rebbe tells him that he wants to spend his birthday together with him!! The Rebbe wasn't writing this merely so that he might receive positive influence by staying longer. The Rebbe



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epitomizes truth; if the Rebbe writes that he wants him to stay for his birthday, it's because he really wants to spend this special day together with him. Such *abavas yisrael* is utterly mind-boggling!

There is a chassidic saying that a *beinoni* loves *tzaddikim* and *beinonim*; an incomplete *tzaddik* (*tzaddik she'eino gamur*) also loves an incomplete *rasha* (*rasha she'eino gamur*); and a complete *tzaddik* (*tzaddik gamur*) loves even a complete *rasha* (*rasha gamur*).

In his response to this fellow the Rebbe continued as follows:

"You should use the time for the study of Torah, engrossing [yourself] in it with energy in such a way that you will be able to enliven others as well. May Hashem bring you success, because this is the will

of Hashem. I will mention [you] at the gravesite [of the Friediker Rebbe]."

Not only did the Rebbe have the greatest love even for such a person, the Rebbe had faith in him that he would learn Torah and ultimately influence others!

A short while later, on *parshas parah* 5733, this young man was by the Rebbe's *farbrengen*, and the Rebbe related a story that didn't seem to be related to the topic being discussed.

A Jewish family once settled in a town not far from Mezritch that was inhabited primarily by non-Jews. One day one of the members of this family, a young man who was a *lamdan* and *yirei shamayim*, suddenly decided to convert to Christianity. His father tried to convince him to change his mind but to no avail. Seeing no alternative, the father traveled



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to Mezritch, entered the Maggid's room, and burst out crying: "Rebbe! Save my son from *shmad!*"

The Maggid entered a *deveikus* and said a Torah on the *possuk* "If a soul will sin and betrays Hashem." He then called over a *minyan* of his students and instructed them to recite *tehillim* throughout the night. Early in the morning, a young man entered the Maggid's Beis Midrash. No one asked him who he was or where he had come from. He spent a few days in Mezritch, visited the Maggid, and returned home.

(This story is printed in Likkutei Dibburim Vol. 1 p. 374. The Frierdiker Rebbe adds that once a widow came to the Alter Rebbe and cried that her son-in-law desired to convert. The Alter Rebbe replied, "I cannot help you, but I can relate what happened with my Rebbe, the Maggid, in Mezritch," and he proceeded to relate this story. As a result the son-in-law found his way to the Alter Rebbe's Beis Midrash and returned to *yiddishkeit* completely.)

HEAVENLY ACHIEVEMENTS

The Alter Rebbe said that a *chassidishe farbrengen* can accomplish even more than *malach Michael*. All the more so if it is a *farbrengen* with a *tzaddik*, regarding

whom *Chazal* say that a *tzaddik* decrees and Hashem fulfills.

The Rebbe, as well as the previous Rebbeim, sometimes used the special time of a *farbrengen* to accomplish certain heavenly objectives. For example, there were times when the Rebbe asked the Rabbonim during a *farbrengen* to rule that Eretz Yisrael belongs to the *yidden*. In addition to the power of a *psak din* to accomplish on High, the Rebbe wanted the *psak din* to be ruled specifically during a *farbrengen*.

Sometimes the Rebbe would mention something at a *farbrengen* that didn't seem to be related to the topic being discussed, and only those who knew what was taking place behind the scenes understood the Rebbe's intent. Sometimes no one understood why the Rebbe mentioned those words, and at times people only understood the Rebbe's intent a while later.

At the *farbrengen* of *parshas beshalach* 5729, the Rebbe discussed a certain Rashi in the *parshah* and concluded by saying that he hadn't yet answered all the questions and would continue discussing the Rashi at the subsequent *farbrengens*. The Rebbe then said: "The *possuk* in this *parshah* says that the Jewish nation left Mitzrayim with a raised arm, which implies that *yidden* are not afraid of their enemies. This is also the idea of the *possuk* 'Perazos teishev yerusshalayim'—'Yerusshalayim will be inhabited without

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walls,' that there is no need for walls for protection because the *yidden* will live in Eretz Yisrael safely."

The Rebbe began singing the *niggun* "*Perazos teisheiv yerushalayim*," and he stood in his place and encouraged the singing with great joy. Then, before leaving the room, the Rebbe began singing the same *niggun* a second time, and before Maariv the Rebbe began singing it yet again. Everyone realized that some spiritual activity was taking place.

A day or two later, four Syrian fighter planes tried to penetrate Eretz Yisrael and harm its inhabitants. With Hashem's help, the Israeli army shot them down before they had a chance to inflict any damage.

EVERY JEW WILL RETURN

During the early years of the Rebbe's *nesius*, I delivered a weekly Chassidus *shiur* at one of the Litvishe *yeshivos* in New York. I developed a relationship with the *bochurim* who attended the *shiur* as well as with a number of *bochurim* who did not attend.

One of these *bochurim* with whom I developed a relationship was considered one of the top *bochurim* in the *yeshivah*. He was very talented and all the *bochurim* looked up to him and respected him. Although he had nothing against learning Chassidus, he didn't attend the *shiur*. He didn't feel that Chassidus spoke to him, and he wanted to spend every free moment advancing in his study of Gemara.

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He really wanted to know if the Rebbe remembered him and if the Rebbe had spoken with him in mind. On *motza'ei Acharon Shel Pesach*, he came to the Rebbe to receive *kos shel berachah*, and when it was his turn to pass by the Rebbe, the Rebbe said, “How are you?”

Once this *bochur* approached me and told me that he had a personal issue he wanted to discuss with the Rebbe, and he asked me to arrange a *yechidus* for him.

I went over to Rabbi Chodakov and tried to arrange a *yechidus* for him in the not-so-distant future. Rabbi Chodakov refused at first because the next few months were already full, but after a lot of persuasion, he finally agreed to set up a time for *yechidus* soon after. There was just one condition: the *yechidus* could not last more than three or four minutes. I explained this to the *bochur*, and he said that a few minutes should be enough for him.

At the set time, the *bochur* arrived and entered the Rebbe's room. However, he ended up staying in the Rebbe's room for over an hour! Rabbi Chodakov was not at all too happy, but there was nothing I could do about it.

When the *bochur* left the room, he didn't repeat the *yechidus* to me. All he said was, “I am not coming back to 770 again.”

I was surprised by his reaction. “What did the Rebbe tell you?” I asked. “Maybe I can explain it to you.”

“No, what the Rebbe said made a lot of sense,” he answered. “But I am never coming back again.”

Around fifteen years later, I was walking down the street in Crown Heights when I suddenly heard someone calling my name. It turned out to be none other than this very *bochur*. He started telling me what the Rebbe had told him at that *yechidus* and what had transpired since then.

This *bochur* grew up in a *chassidishe* (not Lubavitch) home permeated with a *chassidishe* atmosphere. However, when he attended the Litvishe *yeshivah* he lost his *chassidishkeit* entirely, and he devoted his entire energy to becoming a “*gadol batorah*.”

When he was by *yechidus* with the Rebbe, he brought up a certain problem he was dealing with. (He didn’t tell me the nature of the problem, and to this day I don’t know what it was.) The Rebbe told him that a *bochur* with his talents should study Chassidus a number of hours (!) a day, and this will help solve the problem.

The Rebbe began explaining to him the importance of learning Chassidus. Without Chassidus, the motive of a person’s learning is not to connect to Hashem but for personal objectives (such as to earn fame or become a *gadol*), and such learning will not last. If something will undermine his personal objective, his drive to continue learning will end as well.

Without Chassidus, the Rebbe said, it is extremely difficult to truly study Torah *lishmah*. One can forget about the One who gave the Torah and the true purpose of studying.

The Rebbe continued that there are different levels within the realm of holiness itself. A person can learn without any ulterior motives, but he is learning with a certain objective—to know how to act, or even to connect to Hashem (as the Alter Rebbe explains in Tanya). To truly learn *lishmah* means to learn Torah because he feels and sees Hashem in the Torah, because “Torah and Hashem are one.”

By way of example, if a child hasn’t seen his father for many years, as soon as he meets him he will cry “Father!”, run over to him, and embrace him. He is not crying and embracing due to any particular motive, be it to receive something from his father, to fulfill the *mitzva* of *kibbud av*, or even to connect to him. He grasps and embraces him because he is his father!

The same is true by learning Torah. A *yid* sees Hashem in the Torah, because Torah and Hashem are one. “A *yid* wants to meet Hashem and ‘grasp’ him, so he takes a Gemara and sits and learns!”

The Rebbe then asked the *bochur*, “Have you ever seen a *yid* who learns in such a way?”

“And with Chassidus it is possible?” the *bochur* asked.

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“I have seen [*lyidden* who learn Chassidus and learn Torah in such a manner],” the Rebbe replied.

The man continued to tell me that although the Rebbe had explained the importance of learning Chassidus very clearly, he didn’t want to give up hours of his day to study Chassidus and sacrifice his dreams of becoming a *gadol*. However, since he knew that the Rebbe was right, he decided to push the Rebbe’s words out of his mind. That was why he didn’t want to return to 770.

Following the *yechidus*, the *bochur* returned to *yeshivah* and continued his studies as usual. One day he presented a *chidush* (original Torah thought) to his friends. He expected them to admire his logic and praise his ingenuity as always, but this time some of them didn’t agree, and one of them even laughed at his idea.

Not long afterwards it happened again, followed by a third time. The *bochur* didn’t know how to handle it. He wasn’t learning for the sake of learning; his entire motivation revolved around becoming a *gadol batorah*, and the lack of admiration from his friends dealt a severe blow to his self esteem. He lost his motivation to continue learning, and his studies took a steep decline. His personal conduct was affected as well, and his dedication to a *frum* lifestyle weakened.

A number of years passed. The *bochur* married and opened a successful

business. At one point in life, it suddenly dawned on him what had become of him. He was the *iluy* of the *yeshivah*, the cream of the crop, and now he was totally uninvolved in learning!

The man began setting aside times to study, but the Gemara he had once enjoyed so much no longer spoke to him. What difference did it make to him now which argument in the Gemara is correct? As a result, his learning schedule petered out. But it bothered him, and he felt empty and devoid of meaning. He tried putting himself into learning again and again, but to no avail.

At one point, he tried learning Chassidus. He opened up some of the classical *sifrei* Chassidus, but the warmth of the words did not stick to him. He was an intellectual person, and reading words that spoke to the *neshamah* and not to *seichel* didn’t suit his personality.

He then remembered about Chassidus Chabad, which singled itself out as having logic and depth. He obtained a Tanya but had difficulty understanding the concepts it discussed on his own.

One day, he saw a notice in a newspaper that the Lubavitcher Rebbe would be leading a *farbrengen* in 770 on Yud-Tes Kislev. He suddenly remembered about his *yechidus* with the Rebbe and what the Rebbe had told him, and he realized that the Rebbe’s prediction had been exactly on target. At that moment, he

decided to visit the Rebbe's *farbrengen* on Yud-Tes Kislev.

As he entered the *farbrengen*, he heard the Rebbe saying, "The *possuk* says, '*vechoshav machashovos levilti yidach mimenu nidach*'—[Hashem] devises schemes for he who is banished to not be banished from Him.' Hashem arranges for every Jew to eventually return to Him. This is true regarding every Jew; all the more so for a Jew who once studied Torah, whether it was *lishmah* or even *shelo lishma*. Such a Jew has a unique merit, and Hashem arranges for special things to take place that will push him to return to Hashem."

The man continued to share his story with me. "I didn't know if the Rebbe had me in mind or if he just happened to speak about this concept, but when I heard those words I decided to stay. Being unfamiliar with the chassidic terminology I didn't understand most of what the Rebbe said, but the way the Rebbe spoke, the *niggunim*, and the general atmosphere captured my heart.

"On Yud Shevat, I again returned, and once again I barely understood anything the Rebbe said. Then, on Purim, I returned a third time."

"What don't you understand?!" the man told me heatedly. "I see how this *yid* speaks! 'Yidden, the Torah, and Hashem are one!'"

"Why did you come back if you didn't understand what the Rebbe said?" I asked.

"What don't you understand?!" the man told me heatedly. "I see how this *yid* speaks! 'Yidden, the Torah, and Hashem are one!'"

From that day on, this individual began searching me out and asking me to learn Chassidus with him.

He really wanted to know if the Rebbe remembered him and if the Rebbe had spoken about *levilti yidach mimenu nidach* with him in mind. On *motza'ei Acharon Shel Pesach* (if I remember correctly), he came to the Rebbe to receive *kos shel berachah*, and when it was his turn to pass by the Rebbe, the Rebbe said, "How are you?"

We learned Chassidus together for some time. Slowly but surely, many aspects of his personal life changed for the better, and he transferred his children to Jewish schools. **P**

Rebbe

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*The Rebbe's
Extraordinary Balance*



HARAV YITZCHOK MENACHEM WEINBERG



If, in attempting to describe the greatness of the Rebbe, we concern ourselves solely with stories of his miracles, and the like, we will never reach an accounting of his true greatness. Moreover, the purpose of the exercise would only be to seek out those aspects of his personage that are relevant to us, so that we may follow his example.

Therefore, our approach the subject will attempt to assess the Rebbe's greatness by using a different yardstick, a yardstick that in, my opinion, itself requires a re-understanding of sorts: Completeness. What, then, does it mean for a person to be complete, or to be of consummate character?

The concept of completeness—in Hebrew *shleimus*—and that of peace—or *sholom*—are one and the same. But what does peace mean? It is a common error to understand peace as total alignment with a former adversary.

In the course of a discussion of the laws of burglary in Parshas Mishpatim (22:2), the Torah says that "if the sun shines" on an intruder, then he may not be killed in defense of the home. The *Mechilta* understands this turn of phrase to mean that the intruder doesn't wish to cause any harm: "Just as the sun makes peace in the world, so it is here; it is known that he has come for peaceful purposes." Why is the sun said to make "peace in the world"?

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HARAV YITZCHOK MENACHEM WEINBERG succeeded his grandfather HaRav Yochanon Twersky as the Tolna Rebbe, a branch of the Chernobel Chassidic dynasty, upon the latter's request. As a bochur, he was attracted to the Beis Yisroel of Ger, and later became a magid shiur the the Gerrer Sfas Emes Yeshiva in Yerushalayim, working closely with the future Gerrer Rebbe – the Pnei Menachem. He is famous for his guidance in the field of education, and is a powerful and sought-after lecturer in all segments of klal Yisroel.

For over a decade he has been a featured speaker at the Gimmel Tammuz event hosted by Heichal Menachem in Bnei Brak, which serves as an expression of his strong ties with the Rebbe and Chabad. The following is free translation of an article he wrote in honor of the Rebbe's hundredth birthday.

Translated by Rabbi Boruch Werdiger.

Because the sun illuminates, and when the sun shines, everything beomes clear.

Peace is when two opponents learn to live together, to their mutual advantage. Each side hopes to be complemented, and completed, by the other; *sholom* as *shleimus*. To make a perfect choir, the choirmaster must select a *variety* of people, with *different* voices. If an artist wishes to highlight a mountain's size, he will depict that mountain alongside a valley, thus giving a sense of its scale. Contrast, in other words, creates harmony. True wisdom must be holistic; it is knowing the right place and time for *each* and *every* thing. Only through that sort of comprehensiveness one can achieve a measure of perfection, of completion.

In his ethical writings, Rabbeinu Yonah speaks of person who has achieved this sort of perfection, "the person who is consummate in deed." So how can we identify such a person, based on the above definition? True wholeness is to be found with someone who, on the surface, appears to possess contradictory qualities.

If one person, for example, is a maximalist in a particular character trait, and another person who is a minimalist in that same trait, then these two people presumably have deeply divergent personalities. And if we were to find one person who exhibits radical tendencies in one area, and completely opposite behavior in

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another area, we would think of this as being a contradiction.

In truth however, a person who is complete is capable of acting in opposite ways. When appropriate, he will be radical in one direction, and when appropriate, he will be just as radical in precisely the opposite direction. He achieves completeness precisely through that contradiction. And the more wildly different the modes of behavior he is capable of employing, at the appropriate times, the more complete he is.

Therefore, I have chosen to focus on several features of the Rebbe's personage, all of them areas that seem to contain a paradox. In each of them, the Rebbe's contradictory conduct creates a certain balance, and suggests an awe-inspiring degree of *shleimus*. The following points are only a drop in the Rebbe's oceanic personality, but they can lead us to some recognition of the nature of the Rebbe's completeness, and the degree of his *shleimus*, so as to form a guide for us.



A person who is complete is capable of acting in opposite ways. When appropriate, he will be radical in one direction, and when appropriate, he will be just as radical in precisely the opposite direction. He achieves completeness precisely through that contradiction.

PROFOUND SIMPLICITY, AND UTTER GENIUS

While there are countless different modes of Torah study, we can perhaps divide them into two broad classes. The first is a focus on the literal, basic, internal

meaning of a given text; the second a more analytical approach, examining the underlying principles of text, and seeking to reconcile it with any number

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of external sources. In Hebrew, these approaches may be known as *peshat*, and *pilpul*; in the idiom of the Gemara, as 'Sinai,' referring to someone with a broader, comprehensive knowledge base (fluent in the laws given at Har Sinai), and 'Uprooter of Mountains,' (*Oker Harim*) referring to the practice of that analytical, argumentative sort of learning.

Throughout our history, there have been great personalities famed for their lucid, straightforward thinking, and their rejection of *pilpul*, and other contrived methods of learning. The Netziv of Volozhin is known for his singular commitment to *simplicity*. He takes a *possuk*, looks at the preceding passage, and what comes after it: Everything follows from there. The advantages of engaging with the sources directly, and closely, are self-understood, but this sort of treatment of a text has its disadvantages. Sometimes, it comes at the expense of depth, and fails to sufficiently sharpen and advance the mind.

Indeed, the great Torah genius Rabbi Yosef Dov of Brisk, and other like-minded peers at the Yeshiva in Volozhin, would deliver lectures of an entirely different kind, designed to sharpen the mind through *pilpul* and scholarly analysis. At one stage, these divergent approaches become the source of enormous tension in Volozhin. The Netziv's lectures eventually failed to satisfy the stronger students in the yeshiva, because that

genius of Brisk had so intensely advanced the *pilpul* method. The point in this being, it is enormously difficult for a person to immerse himself fully in one method of learning, and to be equally invested in a different methodology. One must come at the expense of the other.

Take the author of the *Avnei Nezer*, the razor-sharp edge of the knife of Polish learning. He is a consistent innovator, constantly upending previously-held conceptions of the subjects he deals with. You won't find in his books the language of someone with a tendency towards straight *peshat*. Take the *Sfas Emes*, whose work on Gemara deals exclusively with *peshat*.

(It's interesting: in his homiletic works on the weekly parsha, it's near-impossible to find three consecutive paragraphs without a quote from his grandfather the *Chiddushei HaRim*, but in his scholarly *Sfas Emes on Shas*, from start to finish, he mentions his grandfather a grand total of four times! The *Chiddushei HaRim*, you see, had a penetratingly sharp approach to learning; the *Sfas Emes*, though a devoted student of his grandfather, paved for himself a new way of learning, dedicated to direct, literal interpretation.)

In the Rebbe's method of learning, one notices something extraordinary. His approach to a given Torah subject is so rich, but the conclusions he draws are so *simple*. It is as though the opposite modes

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The Rebbe's method of learning demonstrates both Talmudic approaches of *Sinai* and *Uprooter of Mountains*, and sometimes at the very same time. These are two opposite traits, that for most scholars, cannot grow from the same earth.

of study discussed above come together in the same method. If we were to follow the Rebbe's approach to the study of *Nigleh*, of the Exoteric dimensions of the Torah, we could say that it tends towards the study of literal meaning, but we could also say it tends towards a deeper, analytical, investigatory approach of the kind discussed earlier. In the *very same discussion*, you can find an extraordinary new take on Torah topic, founded on some achingly abstract, revolutionary piece of inspired Rogatchover genius, and then the Rebbe will apply this cutting

insight to understanding the simplest of ideas. It is to take the most powerfully incisive *chiddush*, or innovation, and bring it down to most basic, literal *peshat*. Somehow, these two opposites combine into one wonderful whole, a complete approach to learning not found in any other study of *Nigleh*.

This Toranic approach of the Rebbe is not merely that simplicity follows from genius, and genius from simplicity, but sometimes it is genius and simplicity all at once. Recently, I rediscovered the

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But once again, here we find an interesting thing: The Rebbe was the most dynamic, vigorous figure of his time and also the most patient, literally all at once.

following brief thought from the Rebbe. When one year around Purim time, the Rebbe spoke publicly about his *Mezuzah* Campaign, Reb Zalman Gurary asked whether the talk had something to do with Purim.

"Of course," said the Rebbe, without any hesitation.

"But what is the connection between the Mitzvah of *mezuzah* and the the holiday of Purim?"

"Look into it more deeply," the Rebbe replied.

When Rabbi Gurary reported back to the Rebbe he did look into the matter, and still found no connection between the two themes, the Rebbe told him that it was alluded to in a *possuk* in *Megillas Esther*. It says that King Achashverosh declared (8:7), "Behold I have given the House of Haman to Esther." What's the first thing a Jew does when he—or she—receives a house that belonged to a non-Jew, as a gift? He puts up a *mezuzah*!

On the one hand, if we are to ask ourselves: "Did the Rebbe reach this insight by stroke of genius, or by simply having an ear for the literal?" it is clear that he came to it by way of *peshat*. One simply has to depict to himself a vivid enough picture of the Megillah's narrative for it to be clear that when a Jew enters a new house, he or she fixes a *mezuzah* to the doorpost. But on the other hand, it is clear that more than just a cute inference drawn from the

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text, this insight also contains profound genius of its own.

The Midrash on the book of Koheles says, "Rabbi Chama said: The word '*Behold*,' as declared by flesh-and-blood, teaches us about the '*Behold*' of the Holy One Blessed be He...When Achashverosh said, '*Behold* I have given the house of Haman to Esther,' it brought life to an entire nation. When the Holy One Blessed be He, about whom it is said, '*Behold* a day of the Lord is coming...' will come, then how much more so." By describing Achashverosh's bequest of Haman's house as bringing "life to an entire nation," the Midrash seems to be suggesting that it was much more than mere the transfer of property. Rather, it represented a spiritual conquest of sorts: the house of Haman becomes the house of Esther, and Mordechai. Where the house once attested to ownership by Haman—the most intense evil—it has now been transformed to become the house of Mordechai, a place where holiness is manifest; starting, of course, with the *mezuzah*.

Another example:

In his glosses to the Pesach Haggadah, the Rebbe quotes the Vilna Gaon, in relation to the curious fact that the Four Questions as they appear in the Haggadah are not the same questions mentioned in the Mishna. The fourth question, that is to say, addresses the custom of reclining on the Seder night in the Haggadah,

even though the Mishna addresses the roasted Paschal lamb. In his commentary on the Mishna, the Vilna Gaon resolves the anomaly by positing that when the Mishna was written, people would regularly recline while eating, and since the *Beis Hamikdash* still stood, the *Korban Pesach* was of course still offered up and eaten. Therefore, he says, since reclining at the Seder wouldn't have been unusual in any way, only the roasted *Korban Pesach*, which was eaten once a year, would have warranted a place in the Four Questions. After the Destruction, the *Pesach* was no longer eaten, and people must have stopped reclining during regular meals, and the Four Questions took on the form they have today.

The Rebbe questions this entire answer by quoting the the Rambam (*Hilchos Chametz uMatzah*, 8:2), who records all *five* questions of the *Ma Nishtanah*, Reclining and Roasted questions included, and *then* adds in the next law, "These days, one does not say, 'Tonight, [we eat only] Roasted,' because we no longer have the *Korban*." The Rambam's construction, says the Rebbe, proves that in the *Beis Hamikdash* era, they did ask five questions! It is a simple question, to be sure, but the Rebbe was the first to ask it.

Yet another well known illustration of that brilliant simplicity:

In the *Chumash*, the portion of Pekudei is the only *parshah* for which no tally of

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pessukim appears. Now, is there anyone in the scholarly community who actually cares about this trivial discrepancy? The Rebbe does care. He first suggests a simple explanation that the tally was indeed once written, before accidentally being dropped from print. (This alone is impressive: Despite the fantastic, creative solution that he suggests immediately afterward, he begins with a dull answer. Apparently, simplicity is more important than being clever! He therefore begins in the simplest way possible.) Then, he suggests a brilliant solution:

It may be, he suggests, that the words, "*Bli Kol Siman*," originally appeared following the *parshah*, indicating that the mnemonic for the number of *pessukim* is the actually the phrase "*Bli Kol*," the numerical value

of which is 92. Only thereafter did the typesetter misinterpret the mnemonic—the Hebrew phrase "*bli kol*" of course means "without any"—to mean that there is no *Siman* for the number of *pessukim*, and erased it altogether.

The Rebbe's method of learning demonstrates both Talmudic approaches of *Sinai* and *Uprooter of Mountains*, and sometimes at the very same time. These are two opposite traits, that for most scholars, cannot grow from the same earth. But, with the Rebbe, the same talk will often contain elements of pure genius, following the incisive, analytical approach to learning, and it will contain elements of pure simplicity, following the literal approach to learning.



ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD, AND NO TIME AT ALL

Another place we find in the Rebbe the fusion of two radically opposed character traits is his combination of patience and vigor; his constant lack of time, alongside the feeling he gave of having all the time in the world.

There are some people who, whether by birth or determined effort to develop their character, are constantly dynamic, and full of brisk, productive energy. This *zrizus*, as it is referred to in Hebrew, has its costs and benefits. The Kotzker Rebbe

once said that responding to a question too quickly is a sign of lazy thinking, not of mental acuity. There are benefits, to be sure, but also costs; it's not assured that he will always come up with the right answer. The capacity for patient deliberation of course brings the benefit of being able to properly and fully analyze the matter at hand—but there isn't always time to wait around. Whatever their relative benefits, though, what is clear is that for a person of an extremely vigorous character, it is

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difficult to act with calm consideration, and vice versa.

But once again, here we find an interesting thing: The Rebbe was the most dynamic, vigorous figure of his time and also the most patient, literally all at once.

The Rebbe's daily schedule is evidence enough that the Rebbe went about all of his affairs with the most extraordinary *zrizus*. Generally, *tzaddikim* spend a long time in prayer. Recordings of the Rebbe *davening*, however, are simply astonishing. He would *daven* at an entirely ordinary speed, not at any length at all. And how much time did the Rebbe dedicate to his own material affairs? The

To ease his anxieties, the Rebbe said, 'I only have two minutes, but in those two minutes, it's still possible to speak calmly,' and then, using the Yiddish word for *slowly*, "we can speak *parolia, parolia...*"

Rebbe's secretary Rabbi Yehuda Leib Groner estimates that the Rebbe slept only four hours a day. Other activities, such as eating, were all conducted with unusual haste, and an almost unimaginable perfunctoriness.

The Rebbe lamented his desperate lack of time numerous times. When a *Yid* who wanted to arrange an audience with the Rebbe once complained to him about how long he had to wait in line, the Rebbe answered that he doesn't have any time

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Obviously, a gentle person will have difficulty acting in a strict manner, and so it is the other way around. But a look at the Rebbe's comportment in these areas leaves one flabbergasted. How is it possible to maintain such radical behavior for so many years?

either. "Even these few moments of my time that you're taking up now," said the Rebbe, "is something I'll have to pay for dearly later on."

And yet. During the time that he did set aside for others, the Rebbe gave people the feeling that he had all the time in the world for them. One Jew who used to live in Crown Heights, not a Chabad chossid, once told me that from when the Rebbe began distributing dollars for *tzeddaka* on Sundays, he loved to go each week. He wasn't connected to the Rebbe in any

direct or public way, but when he heard the Rebbe was dedicating his time to the broader public, he decided to go. He told me, "It was clear as day to me that when I stood before the Rebbe, nothing else in the world mattered to him. It was as though he had declared, 'Move aside! Right now, the only thing that exists is this person standing in front of me, and I have all the time in the world for him!'" This wasn't just the feeling of one person. Tens of thousands who passed by the Rebbe all felt the same thing, every time.

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This is not even to mention the Rebbe's practice of *yechidus* in previous years. How many hours did the Rebbe dedicate to people completely estranged from *Yiddishkeit*?

A Chabad chossid recounted to me that before one *yechidus*, the Rebbe's secretary Rabbi Groner informed him that since it was so late, he would only have three minutes with the Rebbe. Since the matter I've come for is quite serious, the fellow told Rabbi Groner, it will take me at least five minutes to fully explain it, and the Rebbe will certainly need more time to answer me. Maybe it's better to postpone? Rabbi Groner answered that he should go anyway, since he wasn't sure when his next opportunity to meet the Rebbe would be.

When the fellow entered the Rebbe's room, he said, "Reb Leibel told me that I only have three minutes. I'm worried that just saying what I have come for will take more than that."

"Speak," said the Rebbe.

The chossid, while holding in his hand the note he had prepared beforehand, told the Rebbe all the details of his predicament.

"After two and a half minutes, I finished speaking," he later told me, "and barely had a minute left. It seemed impossible that the Rebbe would be able to answer me. I looked at him nervously, and worried that I would feel too rushed to

understand the Rebbe's answer, or that he would speak to quickly for me."

To ease his anxieties, the Rebbe said, 'I only have two minutes, but in those two minutes, it's still possible to speak calmly,' and then, using the Yiddish word for *slowly*, "we can speak *pavolia, pavolia...*"

I don't speak of this as a "miracle" of some sort, but just think of the patience, and the urgency, embedded all at once in those two minutes. If you ask someone to answer a difficult question, and he doesn't have any time, then if he is a patient person, he will try to give his answer at a later time. If he a brisk sort of person, then he will try to speak quickly, at the risk of missing some detail. The Rebbe somehow had it both ways. He maintained a rigidly tight schedule, and had to fit everything in to those two minutes. But in those two minutes, he spoke calmly, and patiently broke down the subject to properly address it.

Such was the Rebbe's daily routine. Even at the long *farbrengens*, there was not a minute that went unplanned. He could sit speaking Torah for six hours, converse with people on the side, say *l'chaim* to the chassidim present, sing, and dance. But everything was set to the clock, every moment filled to the brim. Anyone who participated, or watched one of those long *farbrengens* was amazed to see how there wasn't a single second that wasn't completely utilized in the service of G-d.

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At the end of certain *farbrengens*, the Rebbe would give Reb Moshe Yaruslavsky the cake he had been served, in order to give it out to the visitors. I once heard, in R. Moshe's name, that one such *farbrengen* lasted for over seven hours. R. Moshe had to stand at the ready, so that at the moment the *farbrengen* finished, he could hurry over immediately and receive the cake from the Rebbe. The way things seemed to go, R. Moshe figured that there were still a few minutes to go, but when the evening came to a close, the Rebbe actually had to wait half a minute for R. Moshe to make his way to the table. The Rebbe turned to speak with someone for those few moments, until R. Moshe came he handed him the cake. Then, with a smile, the Rebbe noted: "Half a minute."

Isn't this story mind-boggling? If the Rebbe spent over seven hours *farbrenging*, then it would seem that time was no object. But apparently, it is possible to sit a full seven hours with the congregation, complete with lengthy talks and Chassidic melodies, and long sessions of singing and dancing, and for a half-minute at the end to still be precious. Even though the Rebbe managed to fit in a few good words to another Jew in that time, if a half-minute isn't used for its true purpose, it's already a problem!

No matter how we look at it, the facts seem to cry paradox, just as they declare a wholeness. A shortage of time, alongside a surplus of time; a patient urgency; both operating together, each in its right place. Can there be anything more complete than this?



LOVING, AND FIRM

It's well known that in *Kabbalah*, the traits of *Chesed* and *Gevurah* are opposed to one another. Some people are kind, compassionate people, and some people have more strict, austere personalities.

Chesed types are invariably gentle, pleasant people, but they also have a certain disadvantage. At times a father needs to act firmly with his child, but if he has too soft a nature, he will fail to do so. But being too particular is also a problem.

As the Gemara [Sanhedrin 113a] relates, Eliyahu Hanavi was so strict that he once refused to visit Rabbi Yosi Haglili over a minor slight. Our holy books say that any of these attitudes taken too far, or out of context, is improper. There must be balance between them.

Obviously, a gentle person will have difficulty acting in a strict manner, and so it is the other way around. But a look at the Rebbe's comportment in these

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When it came to the scholarly debate on the subject, the Rebbe was full of praise for his learned interlocutor, but this praise did not detract one iota from the deeply critical view the Rebbe took of his Halachic conclusion. This letter is the most magnificent picture of balance I have ever seen.

areas leaves one flabbergasted. How is it possible to maintain such radical behavior for so many years? To be both tough and compassionate; kind and strict; to have love and fear; all of these emotions to the utmost degree, each of them in its place.

The Gemara in Pesachim has some startlingly harsh language about a person who despises Torah Judaism. The Maharal of Prague has an illuminating comment on this. He explains that there in fact two dimensions to the person described in the

Gemara. He is a Jew worthy of love and respect, yes, but at the same time there is a part of him with a total disregard, and contempt for the Torah. It is solely this aspect that the words of the Gemara are directed towards.

The Maharal's explanation is no doubt true, but who is capable of taking that Gemara on board, and to fully apply both of those wildly divergent attitudes? Generally, we end up with one of two polar opposites: One end of the spectrum is

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"Every person is impressed by something else," someone I know, a serious *Talmid Chacham*, once said to me about the Rebbe. "Me? I just looked at his shoes. I had never seen anything like it in my life. I'm no shoe maker, but my estimate, he had been wearing those shoes for decades.

inhabited by the hot-headed Zealot, who ends up throwing rocks at cars driving on Shabbos because of his combative nature. Even if he isn't naturally inclined to do so, constantly criticizing and reprimanding other people's deficiencies will eventually turn him into a person who only see flaws, and who must loudly protest them whenever he does. On the other end, we end with up an overly liberal, indulgent type, for whom nothing is ever a problem. This attitude has its own risks, and, to borrow a phrase from the *Imrei Emes*, "his love for all people may ruin his judgment; his love will cause him to declare the impure pure."

Now, with these two opposites in mind, look at the Rebbe's approach, and you will see wholeness manifest. I once saw a letter the Rebbe sent to someone who had made a new, illustrated Haggadah. The Rebbe opens with some warm words of encouragement, but then he gently suggests that since the author had sent him a copy of the Haggadah, he most likely wants to hear his thoughts on it. Then the Rebbe launches into a reasoned, but blistering critique of some additions he had made in the Haggadah. The Rebbe

advises against publishing the Haggadah until it is changed, and condemns the effort with some sharp language.

The very same letter expresses extraordinary *Ahavas Yisroel*, alongside extraordinary *Kano'us*, zealousness. Were you to only see part of the letter, you would either think it had been written by some narrow-minded radical, or by someone with a far more open, permissive attitude to Judaism. It's almost as though the letter was written by two different people, but it wasn't: The Rebbe wrote the entire letter, out of one wonderful, complete whole; there is no contradiction. A Jew who takes pleasure in redesigning the Haggadah for the benefit of others is truly deserving of praise, but the Haggadah still shouldn't be printed. [The letter can be found in *Likkutei Sichos* Vol. 22 page 288.]

Another example connected to the Seder night, from a letter the Rebbe once wrote to a certain prominent Torah figure. Only part of the letter has been published, but this person's grandson once showed me the entire thing. His grandfather—who always had been a creative thinker—tried to make the radical argument that there

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was grounds for drinking five cups of wine at the Seder, instead of four.

In response, the Rebbe wrote a lovely, respectful letter. He quotes all of the alternative texts and manuscripts that support drinking a fifth cup; until, that is, he addresses this scholar's conclusion that the established practice should actually be changed. "However," begins the next paragraph. Suddenly the Rebbe begins admonishing the subject of his letter: How could you even consider saying such a thing? How is it possible for someone who has spent time with the greatest

Rabbinic figures of this generation to not know that a universally accepted Jewish practice must be preserved, or how careful we must be not to even touch a *minbag*?

When I saw this, I was shocked by the letter's intensely strident tone. But there is no contradiction here. When it came to the scholarly debate on the subject, the Rebbe was full of praise for his learned interlocutor, but this praise did not detract one iota from the deeply critical view the Rebbe took of his Halachic conclusion. This letter is the most magnificent picture of balance I have ever seen.



EXTRAVAGANCE, AND RESTRAINT

Another point of distinction between people regards their attitudes towards material, or physical considerations. Here too, people more or less fall into one of two groups. An extravagant person knows how to properly indulge his own material needs, and is therefore capable of sharing this knowledge with others, to include them in his experience.

And then some people are naturally more restrained. They have a certain satisfaction, sometimes to an unhealthy degree, of repressing their physical needs. Characteristically, such people are as averse to seeing waste or excess in others as they are indulging in it themselves. Tragically, Holocaust survivors can often

exhibit this behavior. A slice of bread was such a precious commodity in tougher times that even years later, they remain incapable of seeing their grandchildren waste any food at all.

It is a rare thing, then, to find a person capable of exercising the utmost personal restraint who still acts with the greatest generosity with others. The Rebbe was such a person.

Let us begin with the well-known subject of the Rebbe's vacations. In recent generations, all of the greatest Jewish leaders would go on vacations, including the Chabad Rebbeim, who often travelled for health reasons. It is a reasonable, entirely defensible thing to do for one's

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wellbeing. Still, the undeniable truth is: From the day he took upon himself the mantle of leadership, until his passing, the Rebbe quite literally did not take a break from work. This is a well established fact. We are speaking of over 40 years of service, 365 days a year.

Reb Chessed Halberstam, the Rebbe's personal aide, told about the time the Rebbetzin bought two lawn chairs and set them out on the porch of their home. The Rebbe obligingly sat outside with his wife for a minute or two, before declaring, "That's enough vacationing..."

This was, by the way, despite a constant, frenetic, 24 hour-a-day workload spent answering letters and bearing the yoke of public service, planning and executing new projects, studying Torah and innovating endlessly in it. This sort of selflessness is simply unheard of.

Now, one might quite understandably think this is the—admittedly unusual—conduct of a person without any conception of what a vacation is, and without any desire to know what a vacation is. Of course a person like that has no appreciation for holiday-making. Yet, there are numerous letters from the Rebbe on the importance of setting aside time for one's health. In a letter addressed to the children of Camp Gan Yisroel, the Rebbe writes of the unique benefits of vacation time not to be found in the rest of the school year. And the same was

for adults, as evidenced by the letter he once wrote to a person going through a rough spiritual patch, advising him to go on a vacation. It could contribute to his religious life, the Rebbe told him, sometimes even more than his regular *Avodas Hashem*.

The Rebbe didn't just recommend going on vacation in general terms. In his letters to summer camps, he would request that organizers be sure to freshen up the camp experience every so often, so that the children don't grow accustomed to a formal schedule in their vacation time. As the Rebbe explained, change and novelty are key to a vacation. In other words, we are dealing with a person who understands full well the value of rest, and of the benefit it can bring, while he himself couldn't be further removed from the institution. The paradox here is inescapable.

So it was with his attitude towards personal expenses. "Every person is impressed by something else," someone I know, a serious *Talmid Chacham*, once said to me about the Rebbe. "Me? I just looked at his shoes. I had never seen anything like it in my life. I'm no shoemaker, but my estimate, he had been wearing those shoes for *decades*. How can a person keep the same pair of shoes for so many years?" For himself, the Rebbe needed nothing. It is astonishing to read of the "meals" he would take. As it was for



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eating, so it was with sleeping, and for the home he lived in.

But when it came to somebody else, the Rebbe demanded the maximum. When he once visited the dormitory of a women's seminary, he immediately noted it could be improved with a few additions: Putting some pictures on the walls, fixing a mirror at the entrance, a more convenient placement of the beds, installing a sink in each room, and a variety of other suggestions. This is impressive enough for someone familiar with, and accustomed to life's little pleasures; he

simply wishes for other people the same things he himself indulges in. That, however, is not the case here. He himself is completely removed from the world, unimaginably so, but somehow he is still infinitely concerned with the welfare of others. How is it possible to fit all of this in one head?

Someone could write a whole book on the Rebbe's remarkable modesty, and a whole separate book on his remarkable concern for others, and not believe that these two sides existed in the very same person.



LITTLE FANFARE, AND SUPREME CONFIDENCE

Some people are by nature introverted; they dislike and avoid all publicity, and not only in matters of religious observance. Obviously, in religious matters, there is virtue in "walking discreetly with your G-d," to hide on the sidelines. People like this try to be discreet in all of their affairs, and to remain concealed.

Then there those loud, brash, exhibitionist types. Someone of this nature is incapable of doing anything that won't make it to the newspapers. At times, even in the service of Hashem, one needs to make some noise, and to leave an impression. For times like that, you find one of those extroverted types, to ensure that you'll attract some publicity.

With this binary in mind, let us assess the Rebbe's *modus operandi* in his activities on behalf of Soviet Jewry. There was not a person who understood the situation of the Jews of Russia, their plight, and the opportunities for providing them with aid, as the Rebbe did. From his own experiences, as a native and former resident of Russia, the Rebbe well understood the Russian mentality and culture. In addition to this, we must consider his brilliant mind, his significant intelligence channels, and his command of all the information available to him. In those years, long after the rest of the world had shaken off the chains of oppression, the Soviet Union still exercised total control over its citizens,

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Someone who truly serves Hashem is capable of being an optimist and a pessimist at the same time, and to present each attitude as forcefully as the other.

and kept them firmly underfoot. Surely, the obvious response was to loudly protest such a regime, say by rallying in front of the Soviet embassy in the United States. Indeed many *refuseniks*, and their allies, went out to fight publicly for their relatives, and tried to generate as much media noise as they could.

The Rebbe, for reasons that we won't presently explore in any detail, decided that the situation demanded discretion. From the moment that the decision was taken on board, there never was a more dynamic, and more secretive, team of activists. We are only beginning to discover the activities of the Russian Jewish operatives who received their

instructions from the "Father," or the "Zeide," as the Rebbe was referred to in his coded communiqués to Russia. The Rebbe directed many hundreds of hours of coordinated efforts on behalf of Soviet Jewry, without another soul finding out.

In a recently published book from a former employee of the Jewish agency, the author writes of an argument he had with the Rebbe about a particular issue. Only now, he writes, have I learned that those matters that I raised in *yechidus* with the Rebbe, without any response from

him, were already resolved done long before. While I was attacking Chabad for not doing such-and-such, they had already undertaken to achieve precisely those things years before, and on a global scale.

The Rebbe ran an entire operation in Russia, deciding who to send for each mission, where to send him and when, while remaining intimately aware of any changes on the ground, and above all maintaining total secrecy. Who knows the true scope of the activities the Rebbe conducted through the late Rabbi Rosen, Chief Rabbi of Romania?

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Since we seem to be dealing with a person with a preference for secrecy, perhaps, then, he is that discreet, unassuming type?

But what is there to say when this self-same figure decides to launch some new *Mivtza* campaign with the greatest fanfare? Suddenly his drive and ambition knew no bounds. The biggest advertising executive wouldn't have dreamed of creating such publicity. The Rebbe would even stand up to ideologically defend his chosen means of publicity: For him, everything is to be recruited for the purposes of our divine work. Whatever happened to all that modesty? If you would close your eyes, you would think it was a different person.

Looking back, it turns out that on the same day that the Rebbe wrote to Golda Meir that "M.S."—referring to himself—would oppose any efforts to arrange a demonstration outside the Soviet embassy, the Rebbe also joined in that year's Lag B'Omer parade, and sacrificed his own precious time in order to demonstrate to the public how Jewish children could march through the streets with greatest possible pride. How can one person contain such a tremendous contradiction? Only a "Consummate Person" can operate with such extreme secrecy when needed, or with such fanfare, when the hour calls for it. The Rebbe could act with radical modesty, and utter extroversion, without either being affected.



FAITH, AND UNFLINCHING REALISM

Books of Jewish thought speak of this next set of opposites as "dark" and "light" dispositions. Some see life through rose-tinted glasses, while others only ever see black.

The end of Tractate Makkos recounts how Rabbi Akiva began to laugh upon seeing a fox wander out of the ruins of the *Kodesh HaKedoshim*. One might have assumed that he was one of those optimistic sorts, whose eternally sunny attitude preceded his explanation of how the fox was actually a sign of better days to

come. However, the *Beis Yosef* (on *Orech Chaim* ch. 288, s.v. *Mah Shekasuv*) quotes a Midrash that tells of the time Rabbi Akiva's students once came looking for him on a Shabbos day, only to find him, to their surprise, crying to himself in a side room. How could he be mourning on Shabbos, a day meant to be honored and enjoyed? "What else am I supposed to do?" Rabbi Akiva answered them. "For me, crying is enjoyable!" The *Taz* (ibid. 288:2) cites this story, and explains how some righteous people regularly pour out their

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hearts in tearful prayer, as an expression of their closeness to the Almighty. In other words, Rabbi Akiva was a person who was well acquainted with crying, but when what seemed like a good reason to cry presented itself—a fox roaming the ruins of the *Beis Hamikdash*!—he began to laugh instead. In this light, we can appreciate that there was more to Rabbi Akiva's laughter than met the eye.

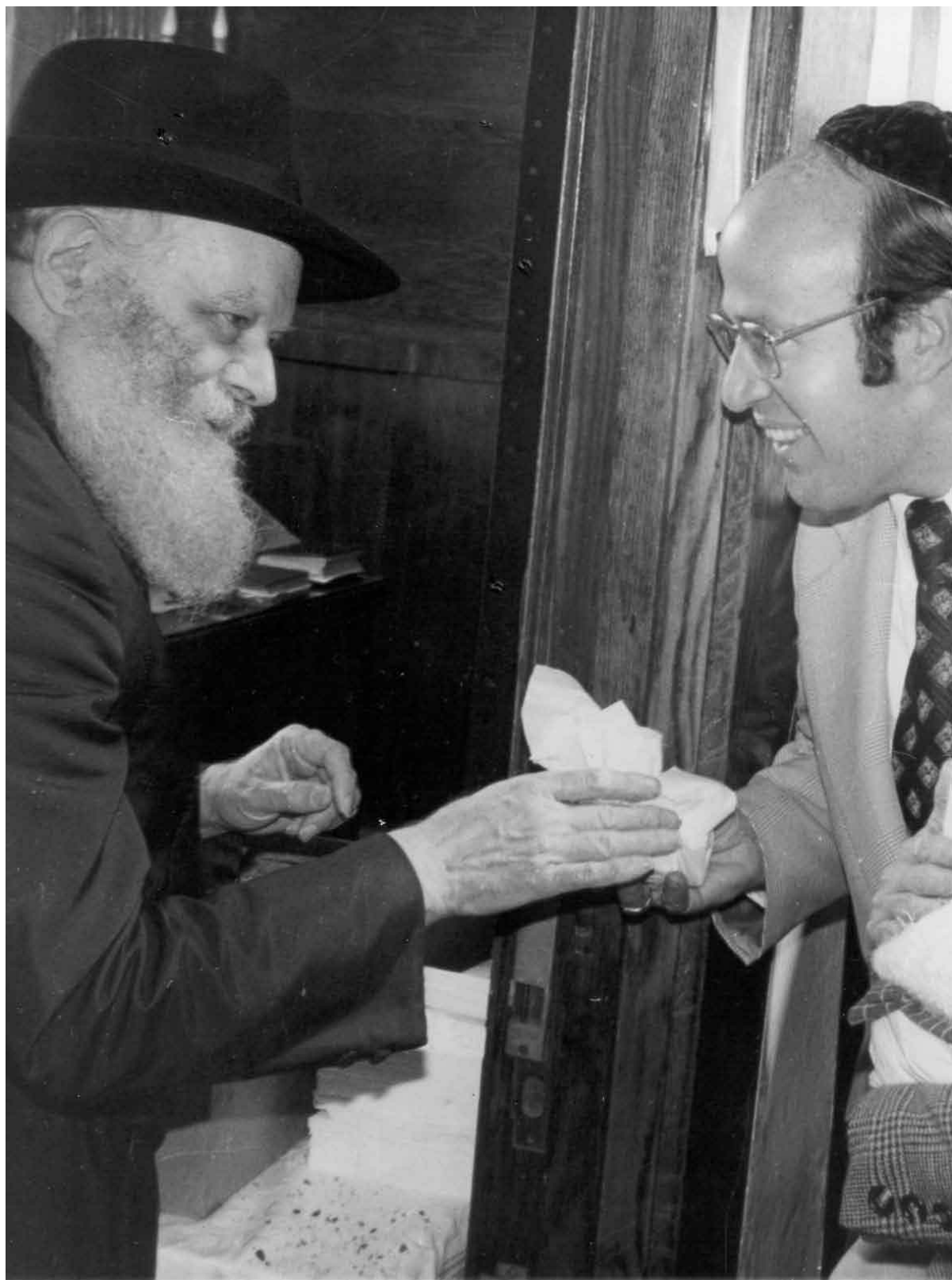
That Chassidic adage, "*Tracht gut, vet zein gut*,"—think good, and it will be good—was a favorite quote of the Rebbe's, and not just because it sounded cute. It was a worldview, and a guiding principle. The constant encouragement he provided others proved him to be a singularly optimistic person, even in the most trying circumstances. In the Six Day War, the Yom Kippur War, and the Gulf War, we saw the Rebbe's optimism express itself tangibly, and even halachically, in his firm position that the wars would end in victory, and that there was no reason to leave *Eretz Yisroel*. This eternally positive affect was not only based on Hashem's capacity for miraculous intervention, however, or on the belief that an impending tragedy would somehow be averted.

The Rebbe maintained the same attitude even after disaster struck. Whether in a letter to a bereaved family, or in a message of consolation after some tragedy, he would insist that they could find the strength to carry on, and that things would be better in future. If then, we

would take this oft-expressed attitude as a clue to his personality, we might identify the Rebbe together with the optimists of the world.

But let's examine the Rebbe attitude towards the issue of "*Mihu Yebudi*," the legislative debate over Jewish identity in Israel.

I'd like to recount an interesting thing: At the time of that bitter struggle over the wording of the *Mihu Yebudi* law—when the Chassidus of Ger, under the direction of the *Lev Simcha*, stood firmly with Chabad on the grave threat that the proposed law posed to the integrity of the Jewish people—I kept in close contact with several highly influential *Roshei Yeshivos*. In particular, I recall speaking with someone who was considered, quite literally, amongst the *Gedolei Hador*, the leading figures of the time, and another person of similar stature. They were pounding their fists on the table, and demanded angrily of the Rebbe, "Why is he speaking so ominously, and warning of such dire consequences if the law doesn't explicitly say that Jewish identity follow Halacha? What is this pessimism? Who says things will be so bad? Why is he making the future out to be so gloomy?" The *Rosh Yeshiva* continued to fume away. "That person," he finally said of the Rebbe, "is just a doomsayer!" He wasn't saying any of this out of hatred, G-d forbid. He simply didn't foresee what would happen.



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The same is true of the Rebbe's attitude towards surrendering portions of *Eretz Yisroel* into Arab hands. On the subject, there really was no great pessimist than him. He made clear that such actions would come at a terrible price, to be paid in Jewish lives. Tens, if not hundreds of times, he warned of the day that "they would set off bombs in Tel Aviv." Someone once told me that Geulah Cohen, the former politician and journalist, recently said, "I was embarrassed at the time to tell people what the Rebbe told me. At the time, he seemed so pessimistic, and so mistaken, that I thought his reputation would suffer if I told people." And today, one by one, all of his predictions have come true. So where is our optimist? Whatever happened to *tracht gut, vet zein gut*?

This is *shleimus* incarnate. That same optimist is capable of acting the doomsayer. Let us leave aside any discussion of his prophetic powers. If, in certain circumstances, the Torah instructs us follow Mishlei's advice (28:14), that "Fortunate are the fearful," to be concerned for the worst, then it is a "mitzvah" to be a pessimist. But even then, in matters unrelated to the fate of the Jewish people, when it is simply a question of personal mood, then it is mitzvah to be an optimist. "And you shall serve Hashem with joy." Someone who truly serves Hashem is capable of being an optimist and a pessimist at the same time, and to present each attitude as forcefully as the other.



ALWAYS APPRECIATIVE, IMPOSSIBLE TO SATISFY

There are moderates, and there are extremists. "Grab too much and you will take nothing, grab a little and you will have something," advises the Gemara, but then again, "If you don't aim high," others maintain, "you will end up with nothing." Each side has something to be said for it. Being easily satisfied can be a dampener for ambition, but a perfectionist will never be able to appreciate a student's gradual progress, because for him, small gains are worth nothing.

Now, witness the Rebbe's all-embracing, continent-spanning greatness: For him, even the smallest things affecting a Jew on the other side of the globe are important. The Rebbe would rate any sort of progress as an achievement. If it would make something stir somewhere in another *neshamah*, the Rebbe would invest enormous effort for that tiny windfall: To put *tefillin* on someone in the street, even just once; to honor a prominent Jew with the opportunity to dance with a Sefer Torah on Simchas Torah, even

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What we must take from all this the impetus to adapt our own thinking, to appreciate that balance—or better said, contradiction—is the path to *shleimus*. This can be true on a personal level, and on a communal level as well, by being more accepting of one another.

though he had difficulty accepting some of Judaism most hallowed values; or to give out Chanukah *gelt* to Israeli soldiers. In this way, the Rebbe aimed for the small things, and made the trivial important.

One would have expected this value system to apply equally to the Rebbe's own followers: If that fellow gave the Rebbe such satisfaction, a chossid could reason to himself, whereas I go to shul three times daily, and study Torah regularly what is there to take issue with? But when the Rebbe would speak to the most accomplished individual, and find some more room for progress, he would make the most vigorous demands of him. Notwithstanding all this fellow's achievements, the Rebbe would suddenly transform from minimalist to maximalist.

Ultimately, this dual approach is the foundation of everything the Rebbe did. His role was to improve his people, and the Rebbe accepted burden of leadership for all of world Jewry, as well as that of his own chassidim. But be that as it may, one would have expected his investment in his own people, and his efforts to raise a chassidic community fully dedicated to

davening and learning, to at least partially compromise the way he engaged with less religious Jews.

Imagine telling some *maskil*, an intellectual who spends four hours a day *davening*, and six hours meditating before that, someone who knows nothing of this material world, "You know your neighbor Abe? He decided to start calling himself Avraham!" The man will scarcely pay attention, and certainly won't think very much of such nominal change.

Somehow, the Rebbe managed to maintain both approaches. With one hand, he would guide young chassidim in their *Avodas Hashem*, and with the other hand, he would reach out to encourage Jews towards basic, practical mitzvah observance.

I once came across a bundle of written correspondence between the Rebbe and someone seeking spiritual guidance. The Rebbe worked to make this person appreciate how precious, and how important he was to Hashem. This was in response to a number of letters filled with despair over personal failings, and some serious challenges he was facing in

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adolescence. The Rebbe wrote with such wonderful warmth: Just the little things you have done up until now shine in the Heavens, and have made an impression in the most lofty spiritual realms. This was all until this fellow emerged from his difficult period. But then, a year and half went by, and a few letters later, the Rebbe was censuring him over subtle things. Still, it was all true; the compliments he wrote to him then, and the rebuke he wrote now.

The *Pnei Menachem* of Ger loved to use the following analogy:

In Halacha, a person can come to acquire something by lifting it up, *bagba'ah*. How then, would one acquire an elephant by this method? Tosfos say that one only needs to place some food for the elephant up high, so that he will cause the animal to elevate itself, to jump. As enormous as the elephant is, it only needs to go a

hairsbreadth higher. The Rebbe could take a chossid and ask him whether he learns the Chassidus of the *Tzemach Tzedek*. Yes, he already learns the Alter Rebbe's *Likutei Torah*, but the Rebbe wants him to start learning the *Tzemach Tzedek's maamorim*. There is no end to such demands. And yet, the very same Rebbe could cherish the slightest progress, should somebody write to him that he had started putting on *tefillin* with two other Jews in his city.

Of all the paradoxes we have discussed here, this is one the greatest, and from a purely quantitative perspective, it was perhaps the most prominent feature of the Rebbe's ethos. After all, this is what he dealt with on a day-to-day basis: The personal guidance he gave to his chassidim, and the incessant, uncompromising demands he made of them, all alongside the attention he gave to a young hippie with a chance to make a small step in the right path.



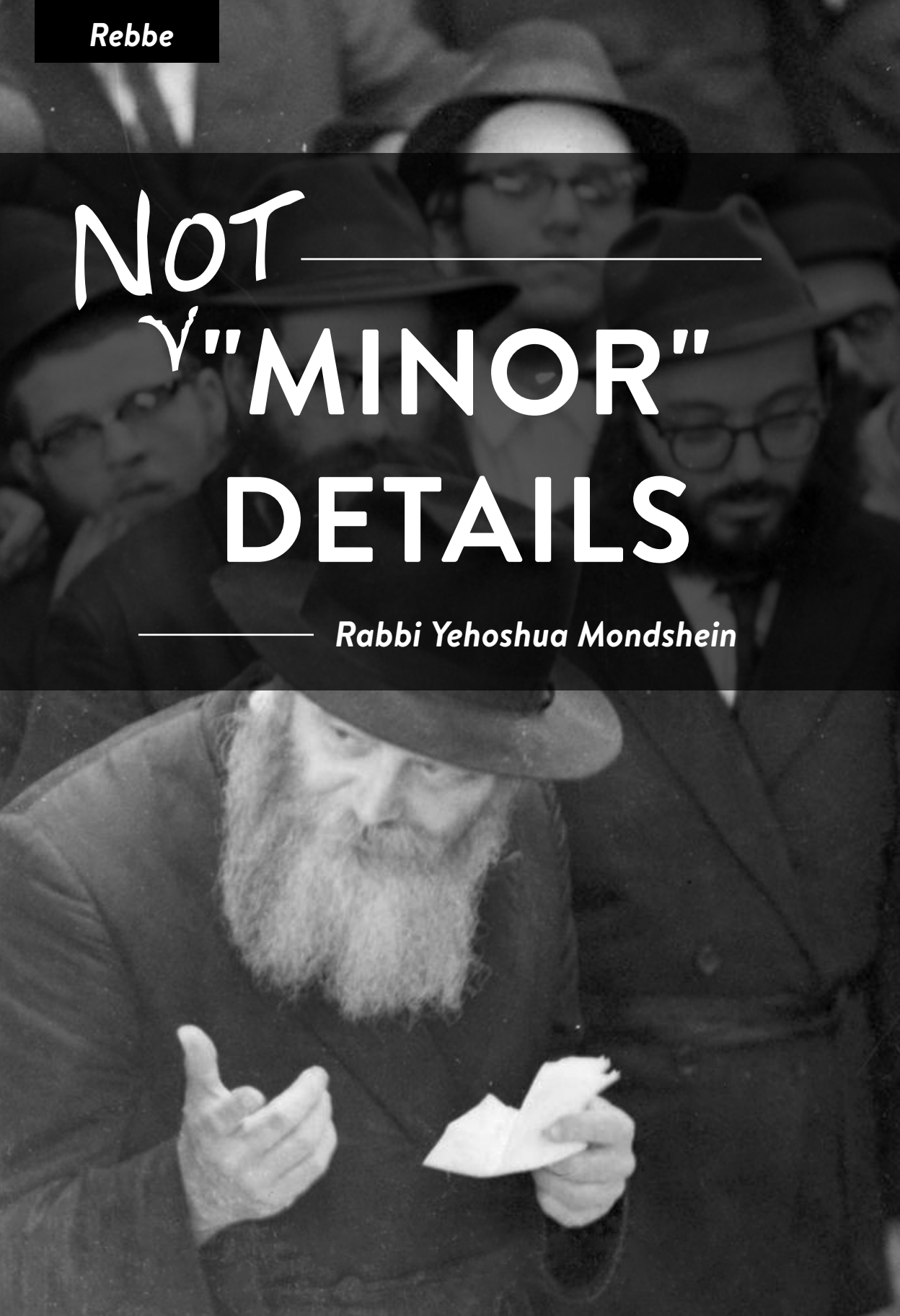
From everything we have touched upon, we must conclude that even if we are unable to reach the Rebbe's level, and certainly not to achieve his degree of completeness, we do see that it is at least possible for all these contradictions to coexist.

The Rebbe dedicated all of his time to the communal good, and gave up everything for them. And in his own person, he demonstrated how paradox can produce perfection. But we are only simple people. What we must take from all this the impetus to adapt our own thinking, to appreciate that balance—or better said, contradiction—is the path to *shleimus*. This can be true on a personal level, and on a communal level as well, by being more accepting of one another. **P**

Rebbe

NOT _____ A "MINOR" DETAILS

_____ *Rabbi Yehoshua Mondshein*



The following is a collection of stories and quotations regarding two "small" and "simple" matters: the Rebbe as a *Shulchan Aruch Yid* and his sensitivity to speak in refined terms.

—— A Shulchan Aruch Yid ——

To be a "*Shulchan Aruch Yid*" seems such a petty matter. Could it be otherwise? Doesn't every G-d-fearing person follow *Shulchan Aruch*?

Yet, with the Rebbe we saw how all of his movements were calculated according to Torah and *halacha*. He did it inconspicuously, and sometimes even endeavoring to hide his conduct. These were practices which were not meant for all, as it says in the *Mishna*, "Not all who wish to assume a position of prominence may do so."



Halacha was the core in the Rebbe's ideals and conduct, including through numerous public affairs. When the Rebbe discussed "*Mihu Yehudi*," he demanded "*giyur kabalacha*," conversion **according to *halacha*** (even when some argued that obviously that is the only real conversion...). The same is true for the prohibition of giving away parts of *Eretz Yisroel* to our pursuers; he founded his stance on a *halacha* from *hilchos Shabbos*. Many other campaigns were similarly based on *halacha*.

Throughout the years, the Rebbe spoke regularly about the necessity of learning *halacha* in a consistent and systemized way.

"The only solution," the Rebbe stated (13 Tishrei 5743), "is to learn these *halachos*, because when you learn them, you know them! In such a case, no miracle or tricks will help. In order to know *halacha*, you have to learn it! When speaking about a *shaila* relating to



RABBI YEHOASHUA MONDSHEIN
OBM was widely recognized as the preeminent Chabad historian of our times. As a young man under the Rebbe's close guidance, he began to work on indexing and publishing Chassidic texts. During his lifetime he authored many seforim and articles on Chabad history, bibliography and minhogim, in addition to publications in various other fields. He also served as manuscript librarian in the Israeli National Library.

As a chossid operating in the academic sphere, he was unapologetic and unintimidated. His writing is characterized by comprehensive and impressive knowledge, originality, provocativeness, and a willingness to battle against what he saw as distortion of Chabad's image by outsiders.

Translated by Mrs. Basya Yabel.

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the *halachos* of *Birkos Hashachar* or even before then, *Netilas Yadaim*, you can't call someone at such an early hour to ask him how to do it..."

On another occasion, the Rebbe admonished community rabbis, who instead of teaching their communities practical *halacha*, lecture on abstract matters and world issues.

"There are *rabbonim* that say their role is to deal only with the greatest matters. In Torah they lecture on the most challenging areas of Torah; in *avodas Hashem*—about general philosophies that encompass all of *Yiddishkeit*; in *gemilus chassadim*—how to fix the entire world through justice and honesty. From this they continue to discuss contemporary events such as the need for democracies around the world, nuclear warfare, and the summits of world leaders.

"Yet when it comes to *hilchos Shabbos v'muktza*, *kashrus*, *tabaras hamishpacha*, *birkas hanehenin*, and the like, these 'simple' matters aren't fitting for their greatness...

"We find the answer in a *possuk*: *lo bora'ash Hashem*, 'Hashem doesn't come with fanfare,' but particularly in those 'simple' things, 'in a still, thin sound.' To explain these integral *halachos* on a daily basis—this is where the King comes!"

The Rebbe noted many times that not knowing what is explicitly stated in

Shulchan Aruch is a result of not learning these *halachos*. To use two examples from *Hilchos Taaniyos*: The first is that the discussion of Zayin Adar is to be found in these *halachos* (which is widely unknown), and secondly that there is a similarity between the body of a human and that of a pig (which became famous recently in connection with organ transplants).



However, the main expression of the Rebbe as a *Shulchan Aruch Yid* can be seen from his personal day-to-day life.

For example, everyone knows the words of the wisest of all men: *sonei matanos yichyeib*, "One who hates gifts shall live," but not everyone is careful to fulfill this instruction. Most assume that it is not a *halacha* but just a piece of sound advice. This wasn't the Rebbe's perspective. Many of those who sent gifts to the Rebbe were answered that this *possuk* is a *halacha* in *Shulchan Aruch* (*Choshen Mishpat*, *siman* 249)! And the Rebbe would include a sum of money for the gift.

Personally testifying to this matter, Rabbi Naftali Rutt recalls his first *yechidus* with the Rebbe (Elul 5719):

"When the *yechidus* finished, I gave the Rebbe an *esrog* holder made of silver with an engraved dedication as a gift from my parents. The Rebbe received the gift with a smile and asked me to convey his thanks to my parents. The next day, the



Everyone knows the words of the wisest of all men: *sonei matanos yichyeh*, “One who hates gifts shall live,” but not everyone is careful to fulfill this instruction. Most assume that it is not a *halacha* but just a piece of sound advice. This wasn’t the Rebbe’s perspective.

Rebbe’s secretary Rabbi Hodakov came to me as a messenger of the Rebbe. He said that the Rebbe was happy to accept the *esrog* box, but because he does not accept personal gifts he requested to pay the full price. Though I tried skirting the issue, nothing helped so I called my parents and asked for the price. The secretariat sent me check for that amount.”

The Rebbe had an additional reason to pay for a gift. Quoted from a letters sent to Rabbi Dovid Nosson Lesser (28 Kislev

5712): “I pleasantly received your gift of waxed candles for Chanukah. Based on what I told you before and as is known (Zohar II, 128b) that a *mitzvah* must cost money, here is a check to be used in good health for what you desire, in a good way.”



The Rebbe was also cautious about such matters which are clearly found in *halacha*, but stem from his extreme carefulness to observe the *halacha*.

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How remarkable was the sight that at the pinnacle of *hakafo*s of the night of Shmini Atzeres 5738 when the Rebbe suddenly had heart pains and sat down, but when he was offered water he adamantly refused since it was before *kiddush* and outside of the *sukkah*!

Here is one clear example of a precaution which the Rebbe practiced for many years with few people noticing: At one time a railing was added to the stairs to the platform where the Rebbe would *daven*. In order to maintain the cleanliness of his hands before *davening*, the Rebbe would make an effort not to touch the railing on

his way to *daven*. If he had to use it, he would use his elbow or his sleeve.

When the Rebbe *davened* in his home in 5748 (the year of *aveilus* for the Rebbetzin A"H), when he came down from his room to the ground floor he would use the railing without touching it. Only after *davening* would he hold the railing in a normal fashion.



Speaking of the Rebbetzin, we are reminded of the Rebbe's spectacular conduct during her *shiva*. The Rebbe gave great honor to the Rebbetzin, sometimes referring to her as "the Rebbe's daughter." From her end, she went out of her way to honor the Rebbe, in many ways acting as a *chossid* to the Rebbe. She wouldn't go to sleep for the night before he returned home from 770, including after a *farbrengen*, *kos shel bracha*, or *yechidus* which lasted until the early hours of the morning.

It is therefore only natural that with her passing the Rebbe's face would express deep pain. Indeed, every time that he lead the *davening*, his voice choked back tears and broke the hearts of all those present. Even when he spoke with Jewish leaders who came to console him, his voice cracked more than once and his eyes filled with tears.

Nonetheless, all of this was only for the first three days, as *halacha* dictates "the first three days are for crying." Afterwards, the great sorrow remained etched on his face, but the tears ceased.

Even more wondrous was his conduct during Shabbos *davening* in the middle of *shiva*. The entire community was engulfed in sadness from what had just occurred to the Rebbe and Lubavitch at large, and with a mix of love and trepidation they prepared themselves to encounter a broken-hearted Rebbe. How great was their surprise when the Rebbe swung his arm in encouragement as he entered the *shul*, causing the crowd to burst out in song. The *Shulchan Aruch Yid* shone through even at such a difficult time, as *halacha* dictates that "there is no sorrow on Shabbos."

[Immediately after Shabbos ended, the emotions returned, which aroused the Rebbe to start new campaigns in the spreading of *Yiddishkeit* and to give new Torah thoughts under the theme of "*Vebachai yitain el libo*."]



In an unusual note among the Rebbe's commentary on the Pesach *Haggadah*, [a *sefer* that deserves a discussion of its own, as it Rebbe's genius in all areas of Torah is expressed in such short annotations], the Rebbe quotes the Alter Rebbe's wording (*Orach Chayim* 481, *se'if* 61) regarding drinking after the *afikoman* on the second

night of Pesach: "The basic *halacha* is that there is no prohibition and one who eats and drinks hasn't done wrong, however one who does so removes himself from being among those who are scrupulous and transgresses the instruction of the *chachomim* that one should never remove oneself from the *klal*." To this the Rebbe adds: "Here we have a **clear psak** as to the extent every person is obligated in *bidur mitzvah*, even when the *halacha* itself doesn't require one to do so!"

The Rebbe certainly fulfilled this instruction.

How remarkable was the sight that at the pinnacle of *hakafo*s of the night of Shmini Atzeres 5738 when the Rebbe suddenly had heart pains and sat down, but when he was offered water he adamantly refused since it was before *kiddush* and outside of the *sukkah*!

The whole idea of not drinking water outside of the *sukkah* is merely a *chumrah*. Additionally, the *minhag* in most circles is that on Shmini Atzeres one need not eat in the *sukkah*, and even among those who are stringent, many do so during the day not at night. Especially, considering the Rebbe's health condition at the time...

All this didn't deter the Rebbe from following our *minhag* of eating in the *sukkah* on Shmini Atzeres, during the night and day, and also being particular to drink even water in the *sukkah*.

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What did the chassidim do? They shortened *bakafos* and the Rebbe went out to the *sukkah*. There—between one heart attack and another—they wanted to give the Rebbe grape juice for *kiddush* instead of wine, but the Rebbe was always careful to make *kiddush* only on wine (even during this trying time), and he insisted that it shouldn't be otherwise. "*Kiddush* is made on wine!" he asserted.



On more than one occasion the Rebbe dedicated an entire *sicha* to "reprimand" his listeners regarding not properly answering "*Boruch Hu u'voruch Shemo*" and "*Amen*." During this talk the Rebbe said that when he was a young child, he didn't know that there was a difference between the two and he was just as strict about saying "*Boruch Hu u'voruch Shemo*" as he was "*Amen*."

The Rebbe's approach to a *halacha* in *Shulchan Aruch* and other matters of *kedusha* was simple and innocent like that of a child who doesn't know of any devices. Nothing stopped him from answering "*Amen*," and he viewed the answering of "*Boruch Hu u'voruch Shemo*" just as seriously. He didn't even miss the responses that didn't have a pause, and which most of the congregation ignored. He attentively listened to the *brachos* of *aliyos* to the Torah, saying "*Boruch Hu u'voruch Shemo*" four times; twice for the first *bracha* and twice for the *bracha* afterwards.

Many are quick to answer the *bracha* of *Hagomel* with "*Mi shegemalcha tov...*" The Rebbe made it known that first one must answer "*Amen*" to the *bracha*.

Even in cases where people might forget that there is a *bracha*, the Rebbe was careful to answer "*Amen*." For example, some mistakenly think that when a father says "*Boruch sheptarani*" without Hashem's name (according to our custom), it is just a "statement" or "thanksgiving." The Rebbe saw this as a *bracha* which deserves an "*Amen*."

The same "simple" attitude was also clearly apparent during the *chazan's* repetition of *Shemona Esreh*. The Rebbe listened attentively to every utterance of the *chazan*, and looked attentively into the *siddur*, his eyes following word after word, line after line...

This was the *siddur* that accompanied the Rebbe everywhere, which he used for every *tefila* and *bracha*.



A painful incident occurred when the Rebbe received an *aliya* to the Torah and the *baal koreh* pointed to the wrong spot, forcing the Rebbe to recite a second *bracha*. The second *bracha* with Hashem's name did not come easily, and the Rebbe's throat choked with tears.



Even during the most exalted moments the Rebbe didn't take details of *halacha*



Even during the most exalted moments the Rebbe didn't take details of *halacha* lightly. At the end of *farbrengens*, after many long hours of *divrei* Torah, during the peak of song and joy, there was suddenly a hush and the Rebbe would announce, "Those that must make a '*bracha acharona*' should do so..."

lightly. At the end of *farbrengens*, after many long hours of *divrei* Torah, during the peak of song and joy, there was suddenly a hush and the Rebbe would announce, "Those that must make a '*bracha acharona*' should do so..."

All other announcements were made through appointed individuals, who would be queued by the Rebbe at the appropriate time. The "*bracha acharona*" announcement

was never delegated to anyone else and the Rebbe would say it himself.

Another task that the Rebbe took upon himself was arranging *seforim* in accordance with *halacha* as he entered the *shul*. Many times he noticed that *seforim* weren't properly placed, and he would rearrange them: taking a *siddur* from on top of a *Chumash*, a *tefilin* bag or a piece of

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A child once wrote to the Rebbe that he had taken upon himself to recite “*Birkos Hashachar*” slowly and with *kavana*, from a *siddur*. The Rebbe responded in his holy handwriting, “You have revived me, like cold water on a tired soul...”

paper from on top of a *siddur*, or turning over an upside-down *sefer*.

In Cheshvan 5732, a *bochur* in the 770 *yeshiva*—Rabbi Yaakov Horowitz—wrote in his private journal: “The Rebbe treats *seforim* with great care and honor, taking other *seforim* off from *Chumashim*... Today on the way back from the *bima* he spotted a small piece of paper the size of a coin on top of a *sefer* and waved it off with his hand.”



We will complete this chapter with a story of the Rebbe and a child:

Following the demand of the Rebbe to add in Torah and *mitzvos*—which was repeated at every opportunity and *farbregen*—a child once wrote to the Rebbe that he had taken upon himself to recite “*Birkos Hashachar*” slowly and with *kavana*, from a *siddur*.

The Rebbe responded in his holy handwriting, “You have revived me, like cold water on a tired soul...”

Among all of the countless going-ons, the Rebbe received his *chayus* from a child who took upon himself to say “*Birkos Hashachar*” with *kavana*.

Refined Speech

The Rebbe paid exceptional care in all matters to ensure refined language, in speech and in writing. This is based on the *Gemara* in *Pesachim* (3a), “A person should never bring forth from his mouth an unfit word...one should always speak with clean language.”

The example that the *Gemara* brings of an unfit word is “*tamei* (impure),” and

the Torah uses expressions and more words to avoid saying something which is immodest. The Rebbe went out of his way not to use words that have any sort of “not good” connotation. He would say, “the opposite of holiness,” “the opposite of goodness,” “the opposite of life,” “the opposite of health,” “the opposite of honesty,” and even “the opposite of intellect.”



Credit: Lubavitch Archives

The Rebbe pointing out a piece of paper on the floor of the shul to be picked up.

It could be easily proven that *Chazal*—as well as the *Rishonim* and *Acharonim*—didn't see any prohibition in saying these words. However for the Rebbe it was quite common that when a *maamar Chazal* would come to his lips with an expression that was “not good,” he would stop the flow of his speech and change the wording to use refined language instead.

Even this saying of *Chazal* itself—“A man should never bring forth from his mouth an unfit word”—the Rebbe would not say because how could he say the word “unfit?”...

Another similar example is that when the Rebbe was explaining the Rashi (at the beginning of Parshas Noach), “There are

those that expound it as praise... and there are those that expound it as belittlement,” the Rebbe shortened the ending to “and there are those that expound it **etc.**”

Or, the known statement of *Chazal*, “*Divrei Torah* are poor in one place and rich in another,” seemingly doesn't have any unrefined language. Nevertheless, the Rebbe had a hard time applying the expression “poor” to *divrei Torah*. Instead, many times the Rebbe wrote “*Divrei Torah etc.* in one place and rich in another.”



In the year 5747, the Rebbe aroused the public to refer to a hospital in Hebrew as “*beis refuah*” (house of healing) instead

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of the prevalent "*beis cholim*" (house of the sick). The Rebbe explained that that second name has a negative effect on those who require their services. The Rebbe himself had already avoided using the term "*beis cholim*" for many years.

The Rebbe also addresses this in several letters. In one letter he writes: "I don't feel comfortable with the term '*beis cholim*,' because the whole purpose of such an institution is to heal through doctors whose job is to heal." To a famous writer, the Rebbe adds that avoiding using "*beis cholim*" stems from the need for refined language.

In this context it is also worthy to note that the Rebbe sent a donation to Dr. Rothschild, the founder of the "*Mayanei Hayeshua*" hospital, along with a request to call it a "*beis refuah*." Indeed that is what is written on the front of the building in Bnei Brak today.



Rabbi Yehuda Leib Shapiro, who served as a transcriber of the Rebbe's *farbrengens* in 770, relates that once when they gave a part of a *sicha* to the Rebbe, the Rebbe erased a complete paragraph that could be understood as a negative statement about *Yidden*, and wrote on the margin, "This paper should be burned and its contents should not be said!"



Here are two incredible examples of how the Rebbe changed even the wording of *Chazal*

in order avoid "not good" expressions, both from *maamorim* from 5740:

The first paragraph of the *maamar* "*Shuva Yisroel*" that was said on *Shabbos Teshuva*, contained the *possuk* "I am the One who erases your sins for My sake" twice. The second time the Rebbe circled the words "erase your sins" to signify that it should be removed (since they were holy words from a *possuk* the Rebbe did not cross them out, circling them instead), and he wrote underneath "Etc." In the margins the Rebbe added in his holy handwriting, "I intentionally did **not** say this," as he had purposely left out the words bringing up the sins of the *Yidden*.

Of course when it was printed afterwards (*Sefer Hamaamarim Melukat 1*, p. 346) it reads, "I am etc. for My sake etc."

The second example is from the *maamar* "*Basukos Teishvu*," (said on 13 Tishrei), which quoted a statement from *Chazal* regarding the *possuk* "A fool believes everything," and they applied this *possuk* to Moshe Rabbeinu.

The Rebbe circled the word "fool" and again he noted that he had purposely **not** said that, changing the wording for Moshe Rabbeinu's honor.

In the final version of the *maamar* (ibid. p.356), it reads: "believes everything – this refers to Moshe Rabbeinu," omitting the first half of the *possuk*.



The known statement of Chazal, “Dirrei Torah are poor in one place and rich in another,” seemingly doesn’t have any unrefined language. Nevertheless, the Rebbe had a hard time applying the expression “poor” to *dirrei Torah*.

The following are examples that connect the Rebbe’s use of refined language for his love for every *Yid*:

A famous instance is the Rebbe’s avoidance of the term “secular Jew.” It is worthy noting that like other many other of the Rebbe’s teachings, this approach has been incorporated by various outreach movements today.

In the *farbrengen* of *Yud-Beis Tammuz* 5731, the Rebbe said that there is no such thing as a “secular Jew.” If he is a *Yid*, Hashem created him in a way of “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

Regarding this matter, the Rebbe writes to one of the ministers of the Israeli government (*Iyar* 5732): “At this opportunity it is proper to address an expression in your letter that is repeated in several places, which always astonished me. I write regarding ‘secular’ (in Hebrew from the root meaning ‘mundane’) and ‘religious.’ The opposite of ‘mundane’ is ‘holy.’ I do not believe that there is a single Jew who is ‘mundane,’ because he or she is a part of a holy nation. Rather, there are those who are involved in mundane

matters, there are those who busy themselves with holy matters, and there are those that are occupied with mundane matters with holy intentions.”



At another opportunity the Rebbe spoke about the “internal and essential love” for *Yiddishe nesbamos*, including those who are present at the *farbrengen* and those who are situated in a “**second** place” and a “**third** place.” The Rebbe explained that he purposely did not say in “*another* place” because “a *Yid* is not found in *another* place. A *Yid* is everywhere where Hashem is found.”



We chose to focus on the “small” and “simple” things seen from the Rebbe’s conduct. To use the Rebbe’s own words, “Hashem doesn’t come with fanfare,’ but particularly in those ‘simple’ things... this is where the King comes.”. **P**

21 Moments with the Rebbe

WHEN ONE THINKS OF THE NEFASHOS

1 Reb Berel Baumgarten, the first *shliach* to Argentina, was always very open with the Rebbe, in his simple, direct, *chassidishe* style.

During one of his travels across Europe in the early 5730's (1970's), Reb Berel was very moved to see the new, state-of-the-art building of Lubavitch in one European city. While rejoicing at the success of *hafotzas haYabadus* in another country, Reb Berel could not help himself from feeling down, for this luminous structure made his modest Chabad center in Buenos Aires look like a little shack.

The next time Reb Berel was in *yechidus*, he poured out his feelings to the Rebbe. The answer was not long in coming, "Who needs great buildings of brick and glass when one thinks of the *nefashos* - the four *bochurim* you sent here to learn in the *yeshivah*!"

The Rebbe then took a recent report from the *hanbala* out of his drawer, and showed Reb Berel that his *baalei teshuva* are from the most outstanding.

"WE'LL THINK ABOUT IT"

2 Hour after hour the Rebbe would stand, despite the doctors' advice, and receive his children, *Klal Yisroel*. Often, after handing out dollars for many hours, the Rebbe would have to treat his arm, but under no circumstances would the Rebbe hear of taking breaks while *Yidden* waited.

It happened once on a *Yud Shvat* that the Rebbe returned from the *ohel*, where he had been standing for many hours, and went straight to *daven minchah* and *maariv*. Then, the Rebbe immediately began to distribute a *kuntres* to the *chassidim* as they filed past.

Reb Yaakov Yehudah Hecht, a warm *chossid*, approached the Rebbe and begged him to taste something, as the Rebbe had not eaten anything at all since the night before. The Rebbe replied, "We'll think about it - tomorrow..."

The distribution of *kuntreisim* continued deep into the night.

“I CANNOT SLEEP AT NIGHT...”

3 During the month of Tishrei 5721 (1960), Harav Shmuel Chefer, the dean of Beis Rivka of Kfar Chabad, had a lengthy *yechidus* with the Rebbe. During the *yechidus*, the Rebbe began to discuss the location of the girls' school and seminary. The Rebbe raised his voice and said, “I cannot sleep at night due to the close proximity of the girls and boys schools!”

This view was echoed in a letter written to President Shazar (Igros Kodesh, vol. 24, p. 126), where the Rebbe writes that only due to technical difficulties was the Kfar originally set-up as one village. But now that it has been made possible, the educational institutions “should be situated in separate locations, the boys in Kfar Chabad, and the girls in Kfar Chabad II.”

The letter continues on to say that while the villages should be separate, they should be close enough that the residents may be able to visit each other on Shabbos. The Rebbe's vision was indeed realized, with the completion of Kfar Chabad II in 5735 (1975).

A SHUL WITH A ROV

Reb Chaim Klien, director of the Heichal Shlomo Institute in *Yerushalaim*, had an interesting *yechidus* with the Rebbe:

The Rebbe asked him, “Who is the *rov* of the *shul* where you *daven* on *Shabbos*?” Reb Chaim answered that there was no official *rov*. To this the Rebbe replied, “If you seek my advice, then on Friday nights, for *kabolas Shabbos*, take your son to a *shul* where there is a *rov*. It makes no difference which *shul* – as long as there is an officiating *rov*.”

“A *Yiddishe* child must know that at the end of *davening*, he approaches the *rov* to wish him a ‘*gut Shabbos*’ and the child will look forward to receiving a ‘*gut shabbos*’ back from him.”

(As told by Simcha Raz in his book *Sipurei Tzadikim*, page 342)

THE LEARNING OF THE BOCHURIM

5

The learning of the *bochurim* was always very dear to the Rebbe. The *banhala* of the *yeshiva* in 770 would go to the Rebbe regularly to report regarding the *bochurim*'s learning and as to how they are utilizing their time.

In fact, the Rebbe once explained (at the *Purim farbrengen* of 5745 (1985)), that the Rebbe's *farbrengens* don't begin until 9:30 p.m. so as not to disturb the *seider* of the *yeshiva* which extends until that time.

For the *kidush levanah* of Kislev 5739, the Rebbe came out at 8:10 pm, ten minutes after the beginning of *seider Chassidus*. The Rebbe told the *mazkirus* (secretariat) to announce that he will be saying *kidush levanah* with a certain *minyán*, on the condition that no *bochurim* disrupt their learning to come out!

6

YOU TOO HAVE BEGUN TO WEAR THIS *SHMATEH*?

Reb Chatzkel Brod, a chossid from pre-war Russia, remembers the first *farbrengen* of the Rebbe that he attended:

Shavuot 5711 (1951). It was extremely crowded, and I sat on the window sill, with one leg in the room and the other outside through the window. But I did not feel any discomfort, as I was transfixed by the Rebbe.

At that time, the Rebbe's *farbrengens* had a family like atmosphere, and the Rebbe would often give individual attention to those present.

During the *farbrengen*, I lifted my cup to say *l'chaim* to the Rebbe. The Rebbe looked at me, and then at the tie on my neck. The Rebbe smiled and asked, "You too have begun to wear this *shmateh*? Remove it!"

Needless to say, I took it off immediately, and ever since, I am not very particular with the American dress code...

"WHEN WILL YOU MASTER ALL THESE *SEFORIM*?"

A conversation that took place on 13 Nissan 5712 (1952):

8

A young boy, free from *cheder*, was playing outside the Rebbe's room. When the Rebbe saw him, he inquired why he was not learning. The child explained that there was no *cheder* during the days preceding *Pesach*. The Rebbe repeated his question, and the child, thinking that the Rebbe had not understood him, repeated his answer.

Seeing that the child was not comprehending, the Rebbe took a *sefer* from his table, opened it to the last page, and patiently said to the child, "Do you see how many pages there are in this *sefer*? And do you see how many *seforim* there are in this room? And do you know that there are many more *seforim*?"

The child nodded his head in the affirmative, and the Rebbe continued. "When will you master all these *seforim*, if you do not learn in your own time?"

WHAT THE REBBE DOES ON SHABBOS

7

Reb Yosef Menachem Vainshtok relates:

During the year 5718 (1958), I would stay for many *Shabbosos* at the home of the Bostoner Rebbe, who lived directly across the street from the Rebbe.

One Shabbos after midnight, the Bostoner Rebbe called me over to a corner of the house and said to me, "The Lubavitcher chassidim think that their Rebbe sleeps on *Shabbos*. Let me show you what really happens."

He then revealed to me that by standing at a certain angle, it was possible to peer into the Rebbe's dining room, because one of the blinds was slightly damaged.

The Rebbe was sitting and learning. Every so often we would see the Rebbe get up to get a *sefer* from the bookcase. We stood there for three hours in silence, watching the Rebbe delve into the depths of Torah.

21 Moments with the Rebbe

DAILY COMMITMENT

9

During one *yeichidus* with Mr. Peter Kalms, a famous British philanthropist and activist, various world issues were discussed (Teves 5737 (1977)).

"I would like to change the topic," the Rebbe suddenly interjected. "It would be a good idea for you to begin setting aside time to learn Torah."

To this Mr. Kalms replied, "Certainly, Rebbe. I will set aside time twice a week for Torah study."

But the Rebbe was not satisfied with this. "No, it has to be every day. It could be for just a few minutes at a time, but it must be a daily study. It is not important that you learn from the original; many *seforim* have already been translated."

"And," the Rebbe added with a smile, "If you do it in public, without keeping it a secret, others may learn from you..."

THE BEGINNING OF AVODAH

10

Even before the Rebbe accepted the *nesius*, many *bochurim* already knew the Rebbe from before the *bistalkus* of the Frierdiker Rebbe. Reb Dovid Goldstien was one of them. One *Shabbos* in the year 5710 (1950), as the Rebbe finished *davening*, Dovid found an opportunity to ask the Rebbe something that had been on his mind.

In Reb Dovid's own words:

"I asked the Rebbe how to begin serious *avodah*. The Rebbe looked at me with such warmth, and said, '*Techilas ho'avodeh iz, az m'tut nit vos m'vil.*' (The beginning of *avodah* is to withhold from doing as you wish).

"Later that day, as the Rebbe was walking Rebbetzin Chana down the stairs, the Rebbe's eyes met mine. 'Dovid,' the Rebbe said to me, 'This does not mean that if you wish to lay *tefillin* one day, you should overcome your wishes...' and the Rebbe and his mother smiled."

21 Moments with the Rebbe



THE BAAL SHEM TOV'S WORK

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Reb Dovberish Shapiro, the son of the Rebbe of Norol, served as the principal of the Belzer *cheder* of Williamsburg during the 5710's (1950's). Many of the students, as well as Reb Dovberish himself, resided in Crown Heights.

The students usually travelled by school bus to Williamsburg, but one day, the bus broke down. Seeing no other way, Reb Dovberish was compelled to collect all the children in order to take them with public transport. And so it was, a procession of little *Yiddishe* children paraded through the streets of Crown Heights, with Reb Dovberish in the lead.

Suddenly, they saw the Rebbe walking on the sidewalk in their direction. The Rebbe stopped, smiled a broad smile of satisfaction, and said to Reb Dovberish: "*Ir tut dem Baal Shem Tov's arbet!*" (You are doing the *Baal Shem Tov's* work!)

The day's mood changed for Reb Dovberish. What had begun as a miserable failure of a morning, turned out to be a memory he will cherish forever.

IN THE MIDDLE OF YOM KIPPUR...

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Yom Kippur 5737 (1976) at 770. The Rebbe finished davening *musaf*, and made his way up to his holy chamber.

Suddenly, Reb Shlomo Maidanchik, the mayor of Kfar Chabad, was summoned. Harav Chodakov had an important message for him from the Rebbe: "The Rebbe has just told me to pass on the message that he wishes a new organization be founded in the Kfar. This institution should assist woman who have just given birth, *mit a vindel un a vegaleh* (with diapers and strollers).

"Everyone should enjoy the assistance of this institution, even the very wealthy, in order to prevent embarrassment of anyone receiving aid. The name should be 'Shifrah and Puah' after the midwives in Mitzrayim."

13 IN LUBAVITCH...

On *Erev Yom Kippur* and on *Hoshana Rabah*, the Rebbe would stand for many hours on his feet, handing out *lekach* (honey cake) to thousands of *Yidden*—men, women, and children. Many *brochos* were given together with the *lekach*, and many a person would walk away feeling lighter from a warm word they had heard from the Rebbe.

A little girl waited patiently in line for her turn to get a piece of *lekach* from the Rebbe's hand. When her turn finally came, her face fell. She looked up to the Rebbe with big, disappointed eyes, "Rebbe, why is there no icing?" The Rebbe smiled, and answered the child in a soft, fatherly tone, "In Lubavitch there is no icing..."

YIDDISHKEIT ON THE SPOT

From the diary of a bochur learning in 770, Sunday, 23 Teves 5731 (January 20, 1971):

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Today, the popular, secular writer and novelist, Mr. Herman Wouk, was in *yechidus*. When he came out, we asked him if he would repeat anything he had heard from the Rebbe. He told us that the Rebbe had discussed with him the situation of the American youth, the "hippies." The Rebbe said that they are ready to hear, so we must provide them with *Yiddishkeit*.

He told the Rebbe that they would not be interested because they are impatient, and only go for things which are immediate, like "instant coffee." To this the Rebbe replied, "That's perfect! The '*Shulchan Aruch*' means 'a ready table!'"

Mr. Wouk was very inspired by the *yechidus*, and expressed great admiration for the Rebbe's insightful ideas.

"WHEN I ASK FOR SOMETHING..."

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The Rebbetzin A"H related:

The Rebbe once came home from 770 with a distraught expression on his face. To the Rebbetzin's inquires, the Rebbe responded, "A number of days ago, I requested at a *farbrengen* that the chassidim report to me how much *nigleh* and *chassidus* they have each learned in the past few months.

"As I passed Brooklyn Avenue, I was expecting to see a line of people waiting to give in their notes, but no one was there. I approached Eastern Parkway, and again, there was no one. Then I came into 770, and I received this much..."

The Rebbe paused and demonstrated with his fingers, showing a small pile. The Rebbe continued in a strained voice, "When I give out *lekach* or *kos shel brachah*, the queues are teeming with people! To take – everyone comes. But when I ask for something, which in truth is for **their own good**, very few participate..."

(As heard from Rabbi Leibel Groner)

21 Moments with the Rebbe

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"HOW MANY P'ROKIM TANYA DO YOU KNOW?"

Rabbi Noach Vogel relates:

In the year 5736 (1976), I spent Sukkos with the Rebbe. Among the many fond memories I cherish from that visit, there is one that shall never leave me. It was Yud Gimmel Tishrei during *davening*, and a young *bochur*, a guest like myself, was snapping photographs of the Rebbe. He had a strategic position, and looked very proud of himself. After *davening*, the Rebbe turned to go. On the way out, he passed the *bochur* and said something to him. From afar, I could see the *bochur's* face turn white.

After the Rebbe left the room, the *bochur*, still quaking, told us what the Rebbe had said to him: "*Vifl p'rokim Tanya kenstu baal peh?*" (How many chapters of Tanya do you know by heart?)

A similar incident is recorded in a chossid's diary of Chol Ha'moed Sukkos 5741 (1980). The Rebbe told a *bochur* to learn twenty-two *p'rokim* of Tanya by heart, to compensate for the twenty-two pictures he had taken!

POSTPONING THE MAIL

Yechidus had finished in the wee hours of the morning, and the Rebbe had asked Reb Leibel Groner to bring in the mail. After working through one pile, the Rebbe asked for another one. And then another.

Reb Leibel knew how exhausting *yechidus* is for the Rebbe, and he realized that these letters would keep the Rebbe awake until *shacharis*. But on the other hand, a *mazkir* must do as he is told. Not daring to suggest anything to the Rebbe outright, Reb Leibel came up with a plan. He wrote a note suggesting postponing the mail for tomorrow, and placed it atop the next pile of letters that the Rebbe asked for.

When the Rebbe saw the note, the Rebbe looked up, smiled and commented, "Do you want me to put this letter off for tomorrow too?" And the Rebbe continued dealing with *Klal Yisroel's* questions, requests, and prayers all through the night.

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THE WAY OF AVODAH

Reb Chaim Sholom Deitsch relates:

"There was a very serious *bochur* with whom I was in close contact. He would daven *ba'arichus*, learn diligently, and make a regular *chesbbon hanefesh*.

"This *bochur* was a deep thinker and was also very self-aware. Being especially honest and naturally critical on himself, he was always working on different parts of his character which he believed needed improvement.

"Before he went in to *yechidus*, he prepared many pages of self evaluation, of his past and his present, providing detailed descriptions. It was a masterpiece of a *chesbbon hanefesh*.

"When he went in to the Rebbe's room, the Rebbe lifted the stack of papers and said, 'A shod! In der tzait volstu gikent shraiben a chibbur in Torah...' (What a shame! In the time [you spent on the *chesbbon hanefesh*] you could have written on Torah matters...)

"The *bochur* was shocked. It took him time to realize that he had been overly engrossed in himself to the point of obsession. In one minute, the Rebbe pulled him out of self-absorption, and saved him from himself. Indeed, today he devotes his time to studying Torah rather than studying himself."

PREPARING FOR THE OHEL

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Reb Binyomin Klein A"H related:

"The Rebbe's preparations before going to the *Ohel* were extremely serious. Even after going for forty years, the preparations still felt like the preparations of *chodesh* Elul for Rosh Hashanah.

"The day before the trip, the atmosphere reflected that 'tomorrow is *Ohel* day.' Everything was different. There was a sense of urgency. The Rebbe's answers would be shorter, and answers of a non-urgent nature were left for later."

Reb Leibel Groner related:

"In Elul of 5719 (1959), Reb Moshe Schneerson, a distant relative of the Rebbe, was *niftar*. The Rebbe joined the *levaya* until the *beis hachayim*, but did not enter. The Rebbe explained to me: 'I cannot go into the *beis hachayim* without going into the *Ohel*—I cannot go into the *Ohel* without the appropriate preparations...'"

21 Moments with the Rebbe



THE OHEL IS WARM

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For hours on end, both in the scorching sun and in the heavy snow, the Rebbe would stand at the Ohel, davening for *klal Yisroel*.

Understandably enough, elder chassidim often begged the Rebbe to watch over his health, and make these visits shorter and less frequent.

On one such occasion, *Shabbos Parshas Vayikro* 5727 (1967), a delegation of elder chassidim, headed by the venerable *mashpia*, Reb Shmuel Levitin, entered the Rebbe's study, and explained that because of the extreme cold at the *Ohel*, they were anxious for the Rebbe's well-being.

The Rebbe would not hear of it.

"I cannot work without going to the *Ohel*," he said. "I must carry the load. And as to your claim that it is cold at the *Ohel*, ask Reb Zalman Duchman (who was one of the delegation). He goes there often, and he'll assure you that it's very warm there."

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WHEN WILL MOSHIACH COME?

In the summer of 5735 (1975), the famous Russian *baal teshuvah*, Professor Yirmiyahu Branover, and his son Daniel went for *yeichidus*.

Daniel asked the Rebbe what he thinks of the rumors that in the writings of the *Arizal*, hints have been found alluding to the fact that Moshiach will arrive in the year 5736.

The Rebbe answered the child:

"From the *Rambam*, it is understood that there were many instances when Moshiach should have come, but due to minor mishaps, he did not arrive. There is no reason to wait until 5736. Moshiach can come in 5735 too! I just spoke at a *farbrengen* about the superiority of the third day of the week, but Moshiach may come on a Monday too!"

The Rebbe then became very emotional, and finished off pointing to himself, and then to them: "If I will improve, your father will improve, and you will improve – **then** he will come."



IT'S ALL IN THE HEAD

THE IMPACT OF TORAH AND MITZVOS IN CHASSIDIC THOUGHT¹

RABBI MENDY WOLF

A THIEF'S ARGUMENTS

Chassidus² explains that when one sits down with a Gemara—whether learning about Shabbos, *kashrus*, purity, or monetary laws—a unique connection is forged with Hashem. Yet, the Gemara often presents an analysis of “a thief’s argument,” the antithesis to the veracity. A thief’s mind which is filled with ultimate dishonesty seems well-removed from Hashem’s ultimate truth. It seems like an oxymoron to claim that the experience

of appreciating a thief’s argument (a typical discussion in Baba Basra) is akin to experiencing the truth?

GREATNESS TURNED OBSOLETE

The unique strength of Torah in battling the *yezer hara*, can be understood through examining two methods that are employed in battling an enemy. One method **defeats** an enemy while the other **annihilates** the enemy. These two

methods are used in any battle, whether in a physical battlefield, or in a business battlefield in the form of a bankruptcy.

(1) **Defeating** an enemy is a **technical** victory. It's usually the result of a technical problem. In business this would be a bankruptcy that happens as the result of poor sales, poor management, or poor strategy. With the right team and capital, everything can change. It is not necessarily the end, rather the beginning of a bright future.

(2) **Annihilating** the enemy: Making the enemy obsolete. In business it's **an idea going bankrupt**. Kodak essentially went bankrupt the moment we entered the digital age. It took time for the bankruptcy to materialize, but since digitalization was a change to a method, it **automatically** bankrupted film-based companies. This downfall is quiet and seamless.

Ideas are the core of a company. A company becomes **irrelevant** when it has an irrelevant idea as its foundation.

Kodak's battle with bankruptcy stands out in three ways³:

1. The battle was fought **far** away; there was no need to enter Kodak's Headquarters, or to woo their top talent or buyers.
2. The bankruptcy happened in a mere **moment**, without the need to gradually capture market share. The **moment** that the digital age began is when the film age was cut-down.
3. They weren't just **defeated**, they were made **irrelevant**. Even the best

management and strategy could not reverse the threat. Kodak was forced to join the new reality and embrace the digital age.

Chassidus⁴ refers to this second model as a **peaceful** war: one not fought on a battlefield. In the times of King Shlomo, nations voluntarily submitted themselves to his rule, though not because they were afraid to fight such a mighty king. Rather, King Shlomo's kingdom brought with it a **recognition** of G-d to the world, and the world's entire **mindset** changed. Since the alien mindset changed, the enemy's **existence** was destroyed.

IDEAS OF THE WORLD

Ideas are the blueprint of the world. Nothing exists if it lacks a conceptual backing. Our feelings and sensitivities are all an outcome of the values we incorporated as our personal compass. Sometimes our values are corrupt; sometimes the influences that surround us have blinded us. It's difficult to keep our heads above water as we swim through the rough tides of life.

The challenge of life is to stay focused. How do we keep the core ideas and principles of life while facing the merciless day-to-day pack of lies we encounter?

Here too, we have a peaceful option in fighting for clarity of mind.

Think of the digital age. What happened? What caused people to consider a film irrelevant?



Credit: Lubavitch Archives

Change happened on the level of one's *consciousness*. It started and ended in one's head. Changing how we see the world.

The answer doesn't lie in some convincing sales person, the answer lies in a specific **recognition**. The recognition of mankind that communication is able to transcend the physical and travel digitally; the moment this recognition seeped into people's consciousness that is the moment that the change occurred.

Change happened on the level of one's **consciousness**. It started and ended in one's head. Changing how we **see** the world.

Just as the revolutionary idea of digitalization obliterated the need for its film predecessor, so too a pure idea can clarify our mindset.

Torah is not just a pure idea, it is the truth. Torah is the authentic state of creation. Torah is the idea with which the world was created. When we **absorb** a Torah concept we are plowing through our self inflicted

confusion and reaching our authentic real self. This experience clarifies our mind.

Mentally digesting something takes time. It demands one to sweat over the idea until they own it, to the point that they feel as if they had devised the conclusion by themselves. Digesting the truth will automatically affect a person because truth dispels darkness, making it so there is no need to fight.

This is what Chassidus calls a peaceful fight (*pdiah shel shalom*). You don't get dirty or traumatized from the effects of a combat battle. The truth itself will dispel the darkness.

DISCOVERING THE TRUTH

Torah fights from home. Discussing a "thief's argument" is part of the process

in discovering the truth. It's one thing not to steal; it's quite another to render the entire mindset behind stealing obsolete. When one learns a Torah discussion on how to deal with a thief, including how justly to allocate the property and name the rightful owner—though the process demands a dissection of the thief's malign train of thought—one clarifies the truth.

Think of the thief's argument as an anecdote to the lies that infest our mind. Every discussion in the Gemara is essentially attacking another layer

the players got confused to the point of choosing whether or not to follow the rules.

When we learn Torah we are reactivating our authentic mindset, changing perspectives and re-activating our desire for adherence to G-d-given law and order. Truth permeates through and through.

But, there is a catch.

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE ATTITUDE


We need to apply ourselves **wholesomely** to the learning of Torah.

In order for any change to be successful, one needs to let go of any and every pre-conceived behavior, even those behavior patterns that are perceived as second-nature. It's impossible to think out-of-the-box when we remain sealed shut. [If the Apple engineers would have decided to stick to a model of print the pictures, what kind of product would they come up with?]

We need to approach Torah with an open mind and **allow** for perspective change. Yes, certain ideas might sound illogical to us, that's OK. Digital film sounded ridiculous too.

With the right attitude we might wake up one day and entertain a certain good thought that in the past we've brushed aside. What happened? Moments of realization are the truth of Torah penetrating our minds. The pot takes time to boil.

The "World of Truth" is not the label for this world. We *do* live in a world that is



Torah fights from home. Discussing a "thief's argument" is part of the process in discovering the truth. It's one thing not to steal; it's quite another to render the entire mindset behind stealing obsolete.

of coarseness with which our world has been "blessed." Every question is a consequence of our difficulty grasping the truth, and every solution is a moment of assimilating it.

Torah ideas are at the core of creation.

Torah created the players. They are born with an inner sense of wanting to play the game the right way; the problem is that

Someone who claims that one plus one equals three is ignorant. However, someone who decries anyone who thinks one plus one is two has a condition.

confused. Total clarity will only be reached when Moshiach comes. But, we do have the ability to alter our balance and to create powerful truthful moments that will help develop a righteous consciousness.

THE APPROACH TO TORAH STUDY

This approach is called Torah *lishma*: to learn without any agendas. To learn because we would like to do some research on ourselves. We are interested in discovering a change to our behaviors.

Learning Torah should be similar to one who seeks a role model.

For example: a science teacher who becomes a student's role model is not just affecting the student's scientific approach, but rather the teacher is affecting the student as a whole. The student might copy the eating patterns of their teacher, the way they express themselves, or any other behavior.

Learning Torah is not supposed to be confined to acquiring a specific area of knowledge. Torah is a teacher, and we should respect and recognize its Author.

A student is one who differs from others in their **approach** to learning—they are hungry to learn and they ask questions, looking for the truth. Eventually⁵ every student will recognize their teacher's

authority, so long as the student possesses this eagerness.

Once the role model approach is developed, the impact becomes obvious. Regular routines change. The connection is a lot deeper than a specific behavioral change; it is a subconscious respect and admiration that seeps into the person as whole.

That is exactly what transpires with one who learns Torah. A Torah student will search out *daas* Torah. Eventually the respect for Hashem (the Teacher) spills over into life; we seek to emulate Hashem in our day-to-day lives and our behavior patterns change.

It is important to note⁶ that this comes much easier when one learns Chassidus, since Chassidus is the study of the Author. It is a direct documentary on the behavior patterns of the Teacher, making the Teacher relevant in our lives, thereby helping us develop an appetite to accept the Teacher as a role model.

TRUTH DOESN'T MAKE CHANGE

If Torah is so powerful, why do we need to do *mitzvos*? Why the need for anything else?

The problem is that the truth can only illuminate. It can't change a mindset, which is what we need.



In order to deal with the world there needs to be some understanding of it, though not in order to be *part* of it.

To explain:

Ignorance is a stage before knowledge. Someone who claims that one plus one equals three is **ignorant**. However, someone who decries anyone who thinks one plus one is two has a **condition**.

These two cases are two stages in darkness:

The first is **lacking light** – we call that darkness. The latter defines darkness as light. This complicated form of darkness is a **disease**.

When someone has created a thick blockage, you can't just **shine** the truth. You need to **dig** deep, chipping away at those layers of illusion. Only through persistently digging and chipping, will we slowly allow the truth to shine.

OUR PERCEPTION PROBLEM

The same is true with us in our relationship with Hashem. We live in a world where darkness abounds. But there is a much deeper issue than simply absence of light:

we're dealing with a faulty perception where we define darkness itself as light!

We all have within ourselves a deeply ingrained recognition of Hashem and connection with Him. Our *nesbama* feels it.

However, once we come down into this world, we develop a sense of independence. Our new identity not only **lacks** awareness of His presence, but **shuns** it.

We need to come to the realization that the physical world we live in, and the day-to-day activities we are involved in, are all part of Hashem's Presence. We need to find Hashem within our bubble.

That's why we do physical acts like putting on *tefilin* or giving *tzedaka*. These physical acts are tantamount to busting our bubbles. They cure us from the disease of defining darkness as light. *Mitzvos* allow the truth of Torah to finally express itself. They prepare us for the real change of perception that comes from Torah.

UNCOVERING OUR RAW IDENTITY

That's why Chassidus compares *mitzvos* to clothes. *Mitzvos* puncture the atmosphere, the attitude, the clothes in which we enwrap ourselves. The physical world's perception is slowly uncovered as a hallow entity. Once we realize how physicality doesn't hold a lasting satisfaction, we start searching for a new meaning.

Then the authentic raw value of this world can be uncovered and eventually internalized as the rightful fit for physicality. At that point, the spiritual truth will fit like

a puzzle **within** the physical world (which is the idea of *Dirah Btachtonim*).

Puncturing and then changing this world is something we never fully complete. It is a balancing act. After all we do live in the world of deceit. We have the “deceit” in our blood.⁷ We eat and drink **physical** food. We work hard for a living and don't have the ‘*monn*’ falling from heaven. It's normal to feel that we are in charge. But, since we have an inner sense of connection, we don't feel satisfied until we've uncovered the depth.

The work is tedious but we *do*⁸ have the ability to slowly incorporate change into our attitudes. We have the ability to recognize the bubble we live in. But, we don't have the ability to annihilate the bubble entirely. It's a balancing act of learning Torah and doing *mitzvos*.

When Moshiach comes we will experience the **ultimate** completeness of feeling the depth within our day-to-day activities. Annihilating the bubble. Then real change will occur and the physical will fit together with the spiritual like a puzzle.

MITZVOS DEAL WITH THIS WORLD

Now we can understand a fundamental difference between Torah and *mitzvos*:

Torah is the truth. It doesn't need to “lower itself” or understand the other opinion. There is no other opinion. That's why when we refer to Torah, we call it Hashem's intelligence. It's pure and holy.

On the other hand, when we refer to *mitzvos*, we say “Hashem had to lower himself.” That's because a *mitzvah*'s job is to **deal** with the world. Not to **shine** onto the world.

In order to deal with the world there needs to be some understanding of it, though not in order to be **part** of it. Rather, the understanding is in order to **cure** the disease; *mitzvos* need to talk and interact with the world. That's the idea of a *mitzvah* enclothing itself in worldly objects.

Torah, although it discusses worldly affairs, doesn't engross itself with them. It shines. **P**

ENDNOTES

1. This article is primarily based on: *DH Vayomer Moshe* 5704; *DH Az Yashir* 5704; *Sefer HaMaamorim Melukat* Vol. 1 *DH Tzion B'mishpat* 1.

2. See Tanya perek 4; *DH Vayomer Moshe* 5704 p. 106; *DH Az Yashir* 5704 p. 131.

3. *Sefer HaMaamorim Melukat* Vol. 1 *DH Tzion B'mishpat* 1.

4. *Sefer Maamarim* 5704, top of page 107

5. See Likutei Sichos Vol. 4 *parshas Behaaloscha* p. 1039.

6. *Ibid* p. 1038.

7. See Tanya perek 1: the *Nefesh Habehamis* is in the blood.

8. As the Mishna says, “One hour of *teshuvah* and good deeds in this world is greater than all of *Olam HaBa*.”

Shidduchim IN THE USSR

RABBI HILLEL ZALTZMAN

Excerpts from the forthcoming book "Samarkand"

*If match-making in general is "as difficult as krias yam-suf,"
finding a match for a chassidic bochur in the Soviet Union was far harder.*

SHIDDUCH CRISIS IN THE SOVIET UNION

Living a religiously observant life in the Soviet Union was always difficult, but at certain times it was even harder than usual, such as when the time came to get married. The main problem was the small number of G-d fearing, chassidic families. In the free world there were hundreds of thousands of religious Jews who could observe a Torah lifestyle without fear. Every young man and woman had dozens

of potential people to marry within a small radius of their home, and thousands of people farther afield.

After the great post-war exodus, very few Lubavitcher families or other religious Jews remained in the Soviet Union. When a young man came of age, he could count the potential candidates for marriage from the entire Soviet Union on the fingers of one hand.

Among the families that remained in the Soviet Union, those who lived in a

community would support one another, and together could educate their children in the spirit of Torah. However, the families scattered in isolation throughout the country, at times just one or two religious families in a city, found it difficult to prevail spiritually.

As long as the children were at home, and under supervision, their parents retained control. However, once they grew up and became independent, many children went off their parents' path.

In the Soviet Union, it was almost impossible to open one's own business. Therefore, someone who wanted to support himself honorably had to study a profession. This is the reason why even our young men and women went to university. Obviously, studying in a gentile environment and the unavoidable socializing with gentile students had an adverse effect. This was the main factor in their veering from their Jewish roots.

Even if they managed to avoid eating non-Kosher food, they found it extremely hard to keep Shabbos. This was especially so in the big cities and especially when working in large factories. Keeping Shabbos entailed substantial sacrifice, and many did not withstand the test. Understandably, this kind of spiritual life ended up weakening them in other critical areas such as prayer, laying *tefillin*, and so on.

But the main problem was finding chassidic girls. In chassidic families the *bochurim* learned secretly and attended *farbrengens* with the elder chassidim where they absorbed the chassidic flavor. Without these institutions of chassidic life, the girls' attitude to Yiddishkeit and Chassidus could only be shaped by the atmosphere in their homes. And when the atmosphere in the street and schools were antithetical to everything they heard from their parents, the girls found it hard to preserve their Jewish character.

This problem, by the way, was the problem of world Jewry up until close to a century ago. The heretical winds of the Enlightenment that blew through the shtetls of Europe felled many, but especially young women who had scarcely been taught about Judaism. They were easily enticed to join the "progressive" *Maskilim*, as they were known. It was the righteous Sarah Schenirer, of blessed memory, who saved the day by founding the Bais Yaakov school in order to combat the secularization of Jewish girls. In 1918, she opened the first independent religious school for girls in Krakow, which turned into a huge network of schools under the aegis of Agudas Israel. The Frierdiker Rebbe greatly encouraged this movement, and in the 1930s he founded in Riga the Achos HaTmimim girls' school, which was to be the first of many.

So a chassidic *bochur* who was looking for a chassidic girl, or even just a *frum*

“It is possible to argue that watching a movie is not inherently problematic. But it can lead a person to a place to where the greatest sin won’t take him.”

girl, had to work very hard until he found someone suitable. Even when he found a girl from a chassidic home whose parents were *temimim* and G-d fearing Jews, generally speaking, if she lived without a religious environment her level of religiosity was much lower than the young man's. It was only with the infinite power of G-d that they managed to overcome their differences and build a chassidic home together.

Unfortunately, there were instances in which a *bochur* met a girl from a chassidic home—from the best and the finest—and after one meeting he discovered that

although the parents were the cream of the crop, their daughter was far from it.

In the following pages I will tell you some stories, some of them without names, about the courtship and match-making—*shidduchim*—that took place in those days.

YICHUS OR GOOD MIDDOS?

One of the young chassidic men in Samarkand, who had a very hard time finding a like-minded girl, reached the age of 30 and was still single. One day, he



went to my sister Sarah's home to consult with my brother-in-law, R. Eliyahu, who was also a close friend of his. The relationship between us was very warm and we felt like one family. So, although I was only fifteen, I heard and knew what was going on.

From what the *bochur* said, I understood that he had been presented with two possibilities: out of all the Lubavitcher girls throughout Russia, only two were suitable! One was from a distinguished chassidic family, and the other known for her fine personal qualities, but from a family we hadn't heard of, and whose father had been killed in the war. In religious matchmaking circles, and perhaps especially so in those days, lineage and family background weigh heavily when determining whether a couple share compatible life values, attitudes and the like. He had consulted with the Rabbi of the Chabad community in Samarkand, R. Eliyahu Paritcher, but still could not decide.

When the *bochur* told everything he knew about both girls, Eliyahu recommended that he meet the girl with the lesser lineage but good character. "You will be able to build a steadfast Jewish home," he blessed him.

The other problem was that this young man was destitute. All he had was shabby clothes and could not afford to buy a new suit. My brother-in-law, who was a truly



charitable person, gave me 200 rubles and said, "Go with him and buy him a suit."

He went and met with the girl and thank G-d, they built a chassidic home together and merited to see generations of *shluchim* and genuine, pious Jews.

"A BOCHUR OF OURS DOES NOT COMPROMISE!"

On one occasion, a *shidduch* was suggested for a certain local young man. The girl told the *bochur* that she was willing to accept all of his religious practices and stringencies, with one exception: she still wanted to go to the cinema.

In those years, the movies weren't as vulgar and indecent as they are today, and many Jewish women and girls in Soviet Russia, like this one, who—



◀ R. Yebuda Kulasher Butrashvili

on the side and *davened* while she waited for him to finish. When he was done, the film had already begun, and they quickly entered the theater and found their seats.

At a certain point, she tried directing his attention to an exciting part of the movie, but there was no response. It seems that he found no interest whatsoever in the movie, and the darkness of the theater had lulled him to sleep...

This young man was in a quandary. On the one hand, he felt uneasy at the thought of his wife going to the movies. But perhaps it was something on which he could compromise. After all, in those days it was hard to find a religious girl, especially one who was almost totally amenable to his way of life.

The *bochur* consulted with my father, who repeated an adage attributed to Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev: "Immersing in a *mikva*—for men—isn't a *mitzvah* in itself, but it can lead a person to a place that the greatest *mitzvah* cannot. Similarly, depression is not a sin in itself, but it can lead a person to a place to where the worst sin won't lead him."

"The same thing can be said about frequenting the cinema," my father asserted. "It is possible to argue that watching a movie is not inherently problematic. But it can lead a person to a place to where the greatest sin won't take him."

although religious—didn't maintain higher chassidic standards, permitted themselves to frequent the cinema. When her mother heard that a chassidic *bochur*, who was careful to the utmost in his religious observance, was being suggested for her, she explained to her daughter that life with such a person was bound to be difficult, and it would be a good idea to leave one small corner for herself—to continue frequenting the cinema.

The mother, who was married to a G-d fearing man, related to her daughter that during her first meeting with her husband-to-be, she offered to take him to the cinema. Uncomfortable refusing, he acquiesced.

When they arrived, he remembered that he had not yet *davened Mincha*. He stood

Without entering into a lengthy discussion, he reiterated, “A *bochur* of ours cannot agree to compromises. It makes no difference regarding what!”

He then went to discuss it with R. Mendel as well. R. Mendel characteristically reacted by stating simply, “A *bochur* of ours cannot agree to compromises.”

He tried to reason about it, but R. Mendel would not yield. Without entering into a lengthy discussion, he reiterated, “A *bochur* of ours cannot agree to compromises. It makes no difference regarding what!” Commitment to the chassidic life must be absolute.

SHIDDUCHIM IN THE SHADOW OF THE KGB

My brother Berel’s matchmaker was R. Berke Chein. As I related in previous chapters, R. Berke was on the run for many years before he finally arrived in Samarkand. One of his hiding places had been in Malachovka on the outskirts of Moscow, in the home of his aunt Bas Sheva, the daughter of R. Meir Simcha Chein. She was married to Reb Yehuda Butrashvili—known as R. Yehuda Kulasher, after his hometown of Kulashi in Georgia. It was there that he met her daughter Chaya Esther, already a chassidic young woman.

When he came to Samarkand and moved into our home, he became impressed by Berel, who was himself a chassidic *bochur*

of good character, as well as being a talented chazan, and a handsome one too. He encouraged Berel to travel to Moscow to see Chaya Esther.

HOW RUMORS GET AROUND

The Gemara says (Shabbos, 130a), “There is no marriage contract without dispute.’ A friend of my parents had a recollection of the girl’s father being overly sensitive in his youth, that he would often cry over nonsense, and concluded that he must be a peculiar sort. They considered the source to be reliable and since when it comes to matchmaking everything is examined under a magnifying glass, my parents decided to drop the *shidduch*. They informed my brother not to bother visiting the home of R. Yehuda Kulasher.

Berel was staying at the home of R. Wolf Nissinevitch who lived in the Moscow suburb of Perlovka, where he met R. Yaakov Notik. R. Yaakov said: Berel, you aren’t in yeshiva now—why don’t you get married?

Berel asked him: Do you have an idea for me?

Yes, R. Yaakov said —the daughter of R. Yehuda Kulasher.

When Berel told him about the information his parents had gotten about R. Yehuda, R. Yaakov dismissed it and said: He is a smart man with a good temperament, a truly pious man, and a genuine chossid. In his youth he was one of the outstanding *bochurim* in the town of Nevel and now he serves as the Rabbi of the Chabad community in Malachovka. He is highly respected by *Anash* of Moscow. How could he be maligned in this way?

My brother could see that R. Yaakov knew what he was talking about and wondered out loud how a baseless rumor such as this got started.

R. Yaakov thought about it and then laughed and said the rumor must have developed from when R. Yehuda first arrived at Tomchei Tmimim in Nevel as a *bochur*. Coming to the yeshiva, he had not known a word of Yiddish, and since all the classes were in Yiddish, he did not understand anything in his first weeks there. He was a very emotional person and on one occasion, he began to cry bitterly about his trouble adjusting. The other students were surprised by this display of emotion and said: Why is he crying so much? Within a short time he will learn Yiddish and will understand it like any of us.

At any rate, said R. Yaakov, it seems that someone heard this story and decided

that R. Yehuda is a peculiar person who cries over nonsense.

After ascertaining that the rumor was baseless, my brother went to R. Yehuda's house to meet with his daughter Chaya Esther, or as most people called her, Anya.

ENGAGEMENT OR WEDDING?

In those days, making an inter-city telephone call was an ordeal, and not just because the KGB tapped every phone conversation. To make the call, you first had to go to the post office and order a time slot. The clerk would then send a telegram to the post office in the desired city, and when it was delivered to the recipient, he or she could book a time at the post office. Another telegram was back with the relevant information, and only then could a conversation be held. All this took a number of days to execute.

This is why, even though things can be quite tense when a couple first meet, and the parents want to know exactly what's going on and what their son thinks of the girl, no-one had made any phone contact with my brother. Out of the blue, a telegram arrived from Berel, which read: "Anya seems most suitable, spiritually and materially. All of the concerns proved baseless. I have decided to make the *T'naim*—engagement—and await your consent and arrival here. I am wiring money to you." My parents could not

afford a trip to Moscow and R. Yehuda, who very much approved of the *shidduch*, sent money to my parents for the trip.

This was 1954, and in Russia of those days it was understood that when a wedding took place in a distant city, the parents would represent the entire family at the wedding. The cost of transporting all the siblings, aunts, and uncles, was simply not affordable. This was all the more so, of course, when only the engagement had been planned. Thus, the rest of us remained in Samarkand while my parents traveled to Moscow.

The trip by train from Samarkand to Moscow took more than three days and so R. Yehuda sent money for plane tickets. These were not jet planes but old propeller planes, and since they made several stops along the way, this “quick” trip took over 24 hours. They left Samarkand on Wednesday at eleven in the morning and arrived in Moscow on Thursday at three in the afternoon.

When my parents met my brother at the airport in Moscow, and heard his positive impressions of the girl, my father said to him: If everything looks good, why should we only make the *T'naim* now and postpone the wedding for a few months? Let's do the engagement and the wedding now!

Berel thought it would be better to make the wedding in Samarkand where the entire family and his friends could



participate. However, my parents quoted our uncle, R. Boruch Duchman, who said it was not a good idea to make a wedding in Samarkand since two weddings had recently taken place there in our family. Another wedding might arouse a dangerous degree of interest on the part of the authorities.

Berel explained my parents' position to Anya, the *kallah*, and to his surprise, she immediately agreed. Later, she told him that her parents had been urging her to convince him to make the wedding early but she was unsure how to convey their wishes to him.

It was arranged that the *T'naim* celebrations the next day would lead directly into a wedding feast, which is why, when my parents arrived at the Butrashvili home, they saw a huge challah loaf sitting on the table, as per the old



MY SHIDDUCH

I was in no rush to marry. I longed to leave Russia and always assumed that it would be much easier to leave single than with a family. When I discussed it with R. Mendel Futerfas, he tried to convince me not to wait. He said, “When the time comes and Hashem decides we can leave Russia, we will be able to leave with our families as well!”

As usual, R. Mendel had an analogy on hand. In 1961, the Soviet Union succeeded to send the first manned rocket into space. Yuri Gagarin became the first astronaut, and the first person to orbit the earth. When he landed, he had been transformed into a celebrity and was famous throughout the world. Said R. Mendel, what’s so great about Yuri Gagarin? It was the engineers who built the rocket and the spacecraft capable of safely taking a man to outer space who are the real heroes!

Rather, Gagarin is a hero because he had survived in a place that nobody had even been to before. Survival, said R. Mendel, is also our task, and our challenge. We must lead full Jewish lives—family lives—in a place and time where others have not succeed.

I had some *shidduch* suggestions and one of them was with the daughter of R. Efraim Fishel Demichovsky from Minsk. My father remembered him from the time he learned in Lubavitch and also knew that

Jewish wedding custom to greet the new in-laws with a large challah. My mother realized that R. Yehuda and his wife had assumed that the wedding would take place right away. And so, all the guests who arrived for an engagement party found themselves attending a wedding as well.

Berel squeezed in all the spiritual preparations he needed to make within the few hours remaining until the *T’naim*-wedding banquet. When he prayed the Evening Prayer the night before the sudden wedding, he became very emotional. He *davened* at length, as though it was Yom Kippur. He closed the door and *davened* with tears until the family started knocking at his door, worried why he hadn’t come out.

he was the son of the Rogatchover Gaon's sister. In fact, while he was a student in Tomchei Tmimim, my father had eaten meals at the home of his grandmother Feige.

This same grandmother, who served as the main breadwinner of her household while her husband sat and learned Torah, had actually raised R. Efraim for much of his childhood. R. Efraim's mother died a few days after she gave birth to him, and so that her son R. Yaakov Moshe could remarry and start anew, Feige took in her infant grandson and raised him in her home. After several years, he went to live with his uncle the Rogatchover Gaon, and at 16, his uncle sent him to learn in Tomchei Tmimim in Lubavitch.

Growing up without a mother affected R. Efraim deeply and he felt the loss all his life. He would often gaze upon his daughter and say, "She might look like my mother." And then, in a wistful tone, "I never got to know her, and I don't even have her picture of her."

We also heard that R. Efraim Fishel himself was a *shochet* in Minsk. His oldest son, nicknamed "Leibke Fishel's," was a good friend of my brother-in-law Eliyahu, who knew him as a chassidic, warmhearted young man with a good head. In short, the Demichovsky's sounded like a chassidic home.

Still, as was always the concern with *shidduchim*, it wasn't unusual to meet

a chassidic G-d fearing father whose children were as different from him as east is to west. So despite all that I had heard about R. Efraim Fishel, I wondered about his daughter.

That summer, I had some communal matters to attend to in the center of Russia and I decided to use the opportunity to travel to Minsk. My plans went somewhat awry and I got stuck in Vilna until Friday morning. A flight from Vilna to Minsk takes less than an hour, but during the summer the flights were always booked out by vacationers, so it would be hard to get a ticket. If there was room on a flight, I decided, this would be Heaven's way of telling me I should go to Minsk and meet with the girl. When I arrived at the airport I found out that there was one seat left on a flight to Minsk.

I arrived in Minsk in the afternoon and asked the first taxi driver I saw to take me to the address I had: 29 Dobrolyubovski Proezd. To my dismay, not only did he not know where it was, but none of the nearby drivers did either. There was a Dobrolyubovdikaya Street, but no Proezd. The drivers started looking through their maps and address books and I began to worry where I would spend Shabbos. I knew nobody in Minsk and the only address I had was one nobody could identify.

Finally, one of the drivers said he thought that the street I was after was a

smaller laneway leading off the larger Dobrolyubovdikaya Street. Having no choice, I went with him and it turned out that he was right. When we entered the lane I noticed a bearded Jew up ahead. He was walking with two pails for drawing water; not everybody had running water in their homes then. I asked the driver to stop, paid him for the trip, and rushed to catch up with the Jew while calling out, "R. Efraim!"

He turned around and when he saw me with two suitcases, quickly brought me into his house, and only then did he greet me. I realized he was afraid lest he be seen for too long in the street in the company of an uninvited guest. His vigilance was familiar to every Jew who lived in those days in the Soviet Union, but R. Efraim seemed even more frightened than I would have expected.

He began interrogating me about where I was from, the purpose of my visit, what I worked in, and what was in my suitcases. It was like a KGB interrogation and I couldn't understand it. Eventually I had no choice but to open my suitcases and show him their contents. There were some volumes of *Tanya* and *Tehillas Hashem siddurim*, items I always tried to get on my trips to Moscow, as well as a thick volume of Chassidus that I had managed to recover on the trip in order to send to the Rebbe. After this search he calmed down and told me why he had been so tense.

Once, on Rosh Hashana night, an unfamiliar Jew had come to shul and after the services asked where he might be able to go for the Festival meal. The shul-goers all referred him to the *shochet*, who gladly invited him. But after a few days, a few detectives came by and wanted to know where the guest was, how "Comrade Demichovsky" knew him, and other probing questions. It turned out that the guest had just finished a prison sentence after being implicated in the escape from Russia after the war. It was Aharon Friedman, the brother-in-law of R. Yitzchok Zilber, a prominent Russian rabbi. In Russia of those days, the police kept close tabs on former prisoners, which is why, when they discovered he was staying with the Demichovsky family, their suspicion was aroused. What connection was there between Comrade Demichovsky and the released prisoner?

Another incident had taken place shortly before my arrival. A Lubavitcher who was friendly with the family also spent a few days in their home after being released from prison. After he left, policemen again came and inquired about him and the nature of their relationship. It turned out that in addition to being an ex-convict, he had dealt in gold and foreign currency, which was considered an especially severe crime in Russia back then.

This is why R. Efraim was very nervous about any guest who landed in his home and the reason he wanted to ensure

that he wouldn't get entangled with the authorities.

Parenthetically, Berel Silverman, a friend of my brother-in-law Aryeh Leib, later told me that a short time after my wedding he was called down to the KGB and asked whether he knew the son-in-law of Comrade Demichovsky. They wanted know who this son-in-law was, where he was from, and what he did for a living. Berel did not know me then and knew nothing about me, so that was the end of that.

As I learned more about R. Efraim's background, I came to better understand the reasons for his constant anxiety and caution from anything that might incriminate him.

R. Efraim and his family had also tried their luck in escaping after the war, but had failed. Since, even during the period of the great exodus in '46-7, the border would frequently close and reopen, they hoped that the day would come when the border would be opened once again. They decided to move to Minsk, which was relatively close to Lvov.

They arrived in Minsk without anything. Even the suitcases containing their clothes and a few personal possessions had been stolen on the way. In the winter they had no shoes and R. Efraim had to wear galoshes tied with string so they wouldn't fall off his feet. Regarding those years he would say, "In one way I was like



our Father Yaakov, 'consumed by heat during the day and by frost at night.'

His oldest son, Aryeh Leib, wanted to help support the family but could not find a job. He was totally illiterate in Russian, having never gone to public school, and without an education one could not get a job anywhere. So, he decided to do some studying, but instead of learning for ten years, he managed to finish high school in two. After another two years in a technical college he graduated as an expert on timber and forestry, which was a sought-after field in the heavily wooded regions of Belarus.

Since everybody had to work in an official capacity, R. Efraim was registered to work in a recycling factory, where he somehow managed to observe Shabbos.



They labored away lovingly, knowing that it brought them a triple profit: the ability to keep Shabbos, to enable hundreds and even thousands of Jews to eat kosher chicken, as well as earning them some money.

The Soviet Union had a shortage in feathers used to stuff pillows and quilts, and R. Efraim had thought of a novel solution to capitalize on it. Since he was a *shochet*, having learned the skill as a boy from Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, R. Efraim told the factory management that he had an idea of how to obtain feathers. He said he would open a store to clean chickens in the central marketplace. Whoever would buy a chicken and wanted it slaughtered would come to him. Afterwards, his wife would clean the chickens and he could give the feathers to the government.

If you've ever tried plucking the feathers of a single chicken by hand, you can imagine how hard it was to pluck feathers

all day. But they labored away lovingly, knowing that it brought them a triple profit: the ability to keep Shabbos, to enable hundreds and even thousands of Jews to eat kosher chicken, as well as earning them some money.

Although he officially worked for the government factory, the KGB knew that he had a spiritual-religious agenda and wasn't merely slaughtering chickens. Although they approved this special business, he was under constant surveillance. This, and the two times he had been interrogated for hosting guests, all made him

exceedingly wary. This is why, when he saw me, his first thought was: Oh no, here we go again!

UNCOMFORTABLE ENCOUNTER ON THE TROLLEY

As I said, I arrived in Minsk just a few hours before Shabbos. When I entered the house, I saw R. Ephraim's wife standing in the kitchen and cooking for Shabbos. She was dressed modestly, as a chassidic woman, despite the summer heat.

I did not notice that their daughter Mussia Shoshana Esther, my “intended bride,” saw me when I got out of the taxi and ran towards her father. The atmosphere had become congenial after R. Efraim's interrogation, and I noticed her standing near her mother and telling her that she had recently bought shoes but wanted to exchange them. Since it would be Shabbos soon, she wanted to go right away.

I only intended on staying in Minsk until Sunday, so I suggested that we go together and get to know one another. Our brief outing was a pleasant one, but as we sat on the trolley on the back home, a young man got on at one of the stops whom I recognized as a Jew. They both blushed as their glances met and I realized they knew one another. Although I was interested in knowing what their relationship was, I didn't dare ask. However, the discovery raised all sorts of doubts in my mind, and made for an awkward ride home.

When we arrived back home, I was even more surprised to see the young man in the house. That was when I realized that he was none other than her brother, “Leibke Fishel's,” as he became known in Tomchei Tmimim of Samarkand. He explained that upon seeing his sister with a *bochur*, he realized she was meeting for a *shidduch* and did not want to introduce himself and disturb our meeting.

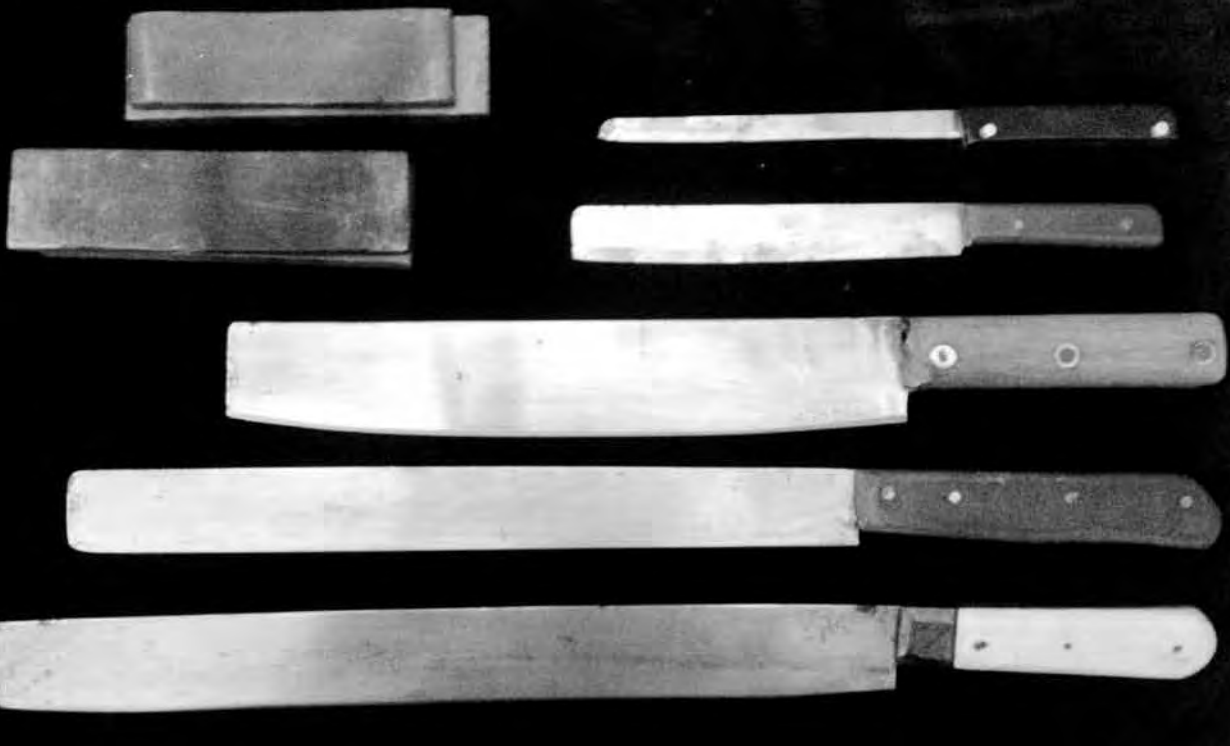
REB YONAH'S CURSE

My first Shabbos meal at my future father-in-law's table had a few awkward moments.

Grapes generally didn't grow in the central regions of Russia as they did in Samarkand, which made kosher wine particularly hard to come by. R. Efraim, like others, would buy his own raisins, soak them in water with some sugar, and after enough time the mixture would begin to ferment and turn into wine. Not knowing exactly how much water could be used in this process for the product to satisfy the Halachic definition of wine—and not be too diluted—I preferred not to use raisin wine for Kiddush.

To make matters worse, when the main course was served, I chose not eat the chicken. Even though I knew R. Efraim to possess a sincere fear of G-d, I still didn't know his technical ability in preparing a knife for *shechitah*. I had never eaten meat from outside of Samarkand, and didn't want to start now. R. Efraim was a stern person, and could be quite sharp too, but sometimes, a young person's obstinance comes from a holy place, and I decided not to compromise. In fact, I thought, maybe it's better they know exactly who their prospective son-in-law is!

R. Efraim was unsurprisingly irritated by all this, but at the same time, he saw it as a sign from Heaven that I was meant for his daughter: Years earlier, in Lvov, he had



Reb Yonah interjected, "Efraim, may you be cursed with a son-in-law who is too religious for even your *shechita*!"

been sitting a chassidic *farbrengen* with R. Yonah Kahn. He made Kiddush on vodka, and after a few *l'chaims*, began speaking proudly of the high kosher standard of his own *shechitah*. Reb Yonah interjected, "Efraim, may you be cursed with a son-in-law who is too religious for even your *shechita*!"

"Since that *farbrengen*," my father-in-law told me, "many chassidim have passed through my home, and they all ate my food without any reservations. You were the first person to refuse to eat my meat, and I understood that R. Yonah's 'curse' was being fulfilled."

My brother-in-law Aryeh Leib also took a pretty dim view of my conduct. He knew

how careful his father was with even the minor details of the law, and suddenly, along comes this *bochur* from Samarkand who thought himself such a chossid that he won't even eat in their home! So as to convince me of his father's great *yiras shamayim*, he told me a story:

One Friday, a woman came to R. Efraim with a chicken she needed to be slaughtered for Shabbos. After he had performed the *shechitah* and sent the woman on her way, he began to have doubts about the Halachic quality of his cut. Despite the late hour, he took two trains to travel to the woman's house, and only after checking the chicken and verifying that his original cut had been deep enough, did he travel back home.

Without anyone noticing, I took the knife, and found a corner of the house to look it over. A heavy weight lifted from my heart when I found that the blade was in fact unbelievably smooth and straight.

Even after I returned with my wife to her parents the summer after our marriage, I was unsure what to do: If I still refused to eat in their home, it would be a real scandal. There was no doubt that my father-in-law was a true *yerei shamayim*, but I had to find out whether he had the same knife-sharpening skills I had seen in my father.

I had studied the art of kosher slaughter in my younger years, following my father's insistence that everyone should be able to *shecht* for himself, or others, should the need ever arise; one never knew how life would turn out. I knew how to prepare a sharp knife, and how to properly inspect one, and I decided to check my father-in-law's knife. The problem was, of course, that I couldn't just ask him upfront to see his knife, not to mention that if I did, and it wasn't to my liking, would I even have the courage to say so?

Instead, I would find where he kept his knife, so that I could check it without him knowing. If I found a smooth blade, I would start to eat in their home, but if not, I would maintain my refusal, and just bear the discomfort.

With a bit of help from Heaven, a woman came by with a chicken for slaughter, and

after my father-in-law was finished, I saw that he put the knife on top of a closet. He then went off to shul early, and after the women had gone to light the Shabbos candles, and everyone was occupied, I realized that the time was right. Without anyone noticing, I took the knife, and found a corner of the house to look it over. A heavy weight lifted from my heart when I found that the blade was in fact unbelievably smooth and straight.

Obviously, I never told anyone of this boldfaced chutzpah, but from then on, I ate from my father-in-laws's *shechitah* without any worries.

FROM 96 SHULS, A LONE SURVIVOR

On that first Shabbos, I saw they had a guest. Afterwards, my father-in-law told me that he was a simple, quiet Jew who could be trusted to not tell what he knew. In those days, that was considered quite a compliment: In general, my father-in-law always lamented that he had nobody with whom to share a few words of Torah and Chassidus, and he was even afraid to discuss current events with other people. "I am alone in a spiritual desert." Over

that Shabbos, he was happy to share some stories of his life and his time in Minsk.

Before the revolution, he told me, there had been 96 shuls in Minsk. By 1963 there was only one left, a semi-official affair, in a rented apartment. In a candid conversation later on, my father-in-law told me how hard it was for him to attend this *minyán*, which mostly comprised a group of Jews lacking the most basic fear of Heaven. On Shabbos he tried to quickly finish *davening* quickly and leave, before they began collecting money from whoever had bought an *aliya*—in order to buy vodka for the *kiddush*. In general, he said, I try to finish Shmoneh Esrei before everyone, because when I take a long time, they start grumbling about the “chossid” who insists on praying for so long.

Over Shabbos and until I left on Sunday, I was favorably impressed by my intended *shidduch* and her family. Although they lived alone, they were not drawn after the winds blowing in the street, and the chassidic atmosphere was as it should be. On her part, she felt similarly about me. Since she planned on traveling to some relatives in Samarkand for Tishrei along with her brother—he was very close with R. Mendel Futerfas, and planned on using the opportunity to see him for the first time in several years—it was decided that we would continue meeting there.

When I arrived in Samarkand and told my parents about my visit to Minsk, they were very pleased. R. Mendel was also very pleased with the match between us since he knew her brother from his youth. They came to Samarkand shortly after, but after a few more meetings I still couldn't decide. I thought we could write letters to one another after she had returned to Minsk and maintain a connection that way. However, my father, who was always practical and very decisive, said that it wasn't right to drag things out and if we were interested, we should make *T'naim* engagement ceremony, complete with a *kinyan*, so as to commit to one another.

That's what we did. We wrote to the Rebbe about our decision to marry and sometime later we received—via Israel—the Rebbe's blessing.

WHERE IS THE KALLAH?

The wedding was set for the next summer, and in the meantime, my *kallah* returned home. That winter, R. Mendel received permission to emigrate and he told me, “If the wedding would have been set to take place now, I would have loved to attend.” Of course, he didn't postpone his departure because of me, and immediately used the opportunity he had been given to leave Russia.

My father-in-law had a half-brother and two half-sisters through his father, who were not religious. They all lived in



Minsk, so before leaving for the wedding in Samarkand, my father-in-law made a goodbye gathering for them. They were all very interested in hearing about his new son-in-law; which university I attended, and what my profession was.

My father-in-law didn't know what to tell them, and when they realized that the groom had not attended university and did not have a degree, they all began to question the match. "You have an only daughter, a talented and beautiful girl, and you're giving her to someone who doesn't even have a profession? How will he support his family?"

My father-in-law responded curtly, "I know he hasn't attended university, but he can do everything!"

His relatives did not bring it up again; amongst themselves they said, "*Nu*, if Efraim agreed to this *shidduch*, no doubt he knows what he's doing." They considered my father-in-law to be a smart man, and would often go to him for advice.

I caught a cold before the wedding and when the *kallah* and her parents announced their arrival, I could not go to meet them. I asked my childhood friend, Yaakov Lerner, to go instead of me. I gave him all the information he needed: The number of the train, their compartment



◀ *My uncle Shimon Zaltzman
saying L'chaim*

had forgotten, and when they woke up, it was too late. They had to get off at the next stop and travel back to Samarkand.

A WEDDING WITHOUT PICTURES

It was a chassidic, happy wedding, and it lingered well into the night as a chassidic *farbrengen*.

number, and the time the train was due to arrive, around seven o'clock in the morning. I described what each of the family members looked like, the main point being that when he saw a Jew with a beard, that was the man he was looking for.

We all waited anxiously but Yaakov returned home alone two hours later. He said that nobody got off the train compartment number I had given him. He even went inside to look but found nobody with a beard. When he asked the conductor, the man had no idea what he was talking about.

A few hours later, they arrived. They had traveled all night and the train was due to arrive in Samarkand early in the morning, so they had asked the conductor to wake them up when they arrived. The conductor

The wedding took place on the 11th of the month of Sivan. It was a chassidic, happy wedding, and it lingered well into the night as a chassidic *farbrengen*. My uncle Shimon Zaltzman came from Tashkent and made merry like a true jester, a *badchan*.

In those days we were cautious not to photograph events such as these, out of fear that the pictures would end up in the hands of the KGB, who were of course eager to know who had attended the wedding and would interrogate us about who was there and what was spoken about. It was only in the following days, at a Sheva Brachos feast in a more private family setting, with very few chassidim, that we dared to take a picture.

Back then, people would joke darkly about the Jew who went to the KGB offices to say he was planning to marry off his daughter. Since he didn't want to be called in for an interrogation after the wedding, to be asked who was there and what they spoke about, he requested that they send one of their men to write a full report. They asked him: Do you perhaps

have the guest list with you? He said yes, he did, and gave them the list.

After perusing it, they said: Don't worry, we won't call you for an interrogation. More than half of your guests are our men anyway!

OUR APARTMENT IN A GOAT PEN

After our wedding, I was forced to contend with a new problem. At the time, the entire country was facing a housing crisis, and things were even worse in larger cities like Moscow and Leningrad. Private dwellings were all but impossible to come by, and the only practical option was finding a residence in an apartment building. To buy into an apartment building, however, one had to know the right people, and be able to grease the palms of the right officials. So, while the well-connected managed to receive government apartments, Lubavitchers obviously did not fall into that category, and those who lived in the big cities could only seek housing in the suburbs. Finding anything near the city center was an extremely difficult task.

The housing shortage became so bad that it began to raise the age for marriage. When young people knew that they wouldn't have a place to live after their wedding, they opted not to marry altogether; those who did were forced to come up with creative solutions.



Often, parents would split up their own apartment so as to share it with the young couple. Generally, these apartments only consisted of one room in the first place, and they would divide the single room with a screen, or sometimes, just a sheet. A couple whose parents were able to give a separate room were considered the lucky ones. It's easy to understand how this sort of situation wasn't exactly appealing to young men and women thinking of marriage, and instead they preferred to push off marriage further and further, in the hopes that somehow, things would be better in the future.



My Sheva Brachos: L-R: R. Yaakov Boroshansky (holding the cup), R. Chaim Zalman Kozliner (standing) R. Berel Yofeh, myself, Ben-Tzion Mishulovin (boy), my father R. Avrohom Zaltzman.

When I am reminded of how we lived after our own wedding, and the manner in which we first settled down, I feel a need to commit these memories to paper, for the young brides and grooms of today. Perhaps by reading them, they can gain a sense of how it is possible to live a happy life even when material circumstances are far less than ideal. With this understanding, I imagine that they will demand less of their parents, especially of parents without considerable financial means.

In anticipation of my wedding, I began looking for a small apartment appropriate for a young couple, but even in Samarkand it was no easy task. So it was that I found myself just weeks before my wedding without a place to live, and no sign of anything on the horizon.

At a loss, I turned my attention to a storage shed in my parent's backyard, and decided to turn it into a home. The shed consisted of a relatively large room, with a hallway of sorts alongside it, and was being used to house the goat my

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parents kept for milk. Simply evicting the goat wasn't an option, seeing as the winter rains and cold would have likely killed it. Besides, it was a "Jewish" goat, who had the great merit of providing us all with fully supervised dairy products! One way or another, I prepared a new place for the goat, and we—the newlyweds—took its place.

I couldn't be too picky when it came to furnishing our little abode, either. Since I had no money for any new furniture, I tried to make do with what was there. Sitting in our yard was an old bed that had been thrown out years earlier, and had weathered several winters' worth of rain and snow. After a few repairs to ensure it wouldn't completely collapse the moment someone sat down on it, it came into to the house, where it joined

another folding bed I had found. A relative bought us a clothes closet as a gift, and although we didn't have a proper mirror, we made do with the one attached to the door of the wardrobe. Our luxurious bedroom was ready.

On the other side of the room lay our dining room, which we had also managed to furnish piecemeal. The only items of furniture that were actually new were six chairs that my uncle R. Shimon Zaltzman had given us as a wedding gift. I found an old table in my parent's house, and now we had beautiful dining room, if you could call it that. Our dining room even had a display cabinet I had made by lining two wooden tea boxes with silver foil and stacking one on top of the other, in which we kept some porcelain and a few glasses we had received from relatives. **P**

Let's Have a Talk...



This article appeared in Yiddish in Di Yiddishe Heim, Spring 5719 (1959)



Our Torah requires that it be implemented practically in our lives. The Alter Rebbe explains in Tanya that if someone were to dwell and meditate on the deepest secrets and insights inherent in the *mitzva* of *esrog*, for instance, he would still not have fulfilled the *mitzva* until he used his physical hand to grasp an actual fruit from an *esrog* tree.

It is this practical aspect which is the primary component of Torah observance.

In this generation and particularly in this country we often encounter the phenomenon where people are agreeable as long as the focus remains theoretical, never approaching the point. Everyone can agree that it's important to be 'good and pious,' everyone can accept that Torah and *mitzvos* are very nice. We no longer encounter the old, hardboiled heretics of a generation or two ago, who were even opposed to the idea Torah and *mitzvos*.

FIELDS YES – CHICKENS NO

The problems begin when attempting to make an actual demand of a person, when it becomes clear that something is actually expected of the individual; this is far, far more difficult to pull off.

A tale is told of the first years following the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, when the kolkhoz (collective farming) system was implemented. A commissar of the Communist Party once showed up and wished to investigate how far the new doctrine had penetrated the heads of the peasants: “What would you do if you had 50 acres of land?” he asked one. The peasant, who had already been lectured to, replied: “I would give it away to the kolkhoz.” The commissar pressed ahead: “And what would you do if you had 500 cattle?” “Off to the kolkhoz they’d go,” was the reply. “And a herd of 1,000 sheep?” “The kolkhoz!” Pleased with the patriotic responses, the commissar asked: “And what would you do if you had 10 chickens?” “I’d never give those away under any circumstance,” the peasant replied. The commissar was nonplussed: “You’d give away 50 acres of land, 500 cattle, 1,000 sheep, but not 10 chickens? Why?!” “Because I actually own those 10 chickens,” answered the peasant.

The problems begin when attempting to make an actual demand of a person, when it becomes clear that something is actually expected of the individual...

The peasant in this parable is representative of human nature. And it is these “10 chickens” that this article intends to focus on. After all, even a large estate is ultimately comprised of many groups of “10 chickens,” just like a large forest is ultimately made up of many trees and bushes.

THE HANG-UPS

A basic premise of psychology is that burrowing down to the true, hidden cause of an illness or hang-up is a crucial element of healing. We will therefore attempt to assess in brief the true causes of these phenomena in everyday life.

The root of the matter does not seem to be that people are truly rotten and refuse to behave appropriately, or even that the *yetzer hara* has persuaded them to act contrary to Torah. Rather it is the notion that one must be “in style,” out of fear that “they” will say that she is “old-fashioned,” a “fanatic” and whatnot. Identifying this mysterious “they” is often curiously

difficult; is it the ethnic neighbor next door, or the loud busybody across town who can barely sign her own name? “They” often don’t exist anywhere outside of fantasy. And it is due to a latent fear of this mythical scoffer that fundamental Torah matters get pushed aside.

Many readers might read this and wince: They aren’t really going to “go there,” are they?

If this is the case in general, it is particularly symptomatic of the topic under discussion: Modesty.

Many readers might read this and wince: They aren’t really going to “go there,” are they? But upon making that grimace, ask yourselves: Why in fact is raising this topic so upsetting? What about all the English (and unfortunately even “Jewish”) newspapers and magazines that we bring into our homes which discuss all sorts of things which are truly inappropriate? Why then is it specifically when an important subject such as modesty is raised that people become so sensitive?

The answer frequently is that, like the Russian peasant, this actually impacts us.

MODESTY – OUR CROWN

There is no need to dwell much on the greatness and importance of *tznius*, because, as pointed out previously, everyone can tolerate speaking in generalities. Modesty and bashfulness is one of our defining characteristics,

“bashful, merciful and charitable.” Jewish modesty

even elicited a grudging compliment from the evil Bilam: “*Mah tovu ohalecha Yaakov.*” On the flip side, there is no other sin in the Torah about which there is a consequence as harsh as

“Hashem will turn away from you” as it says about “*v’lo yeira’eh b’cha ervas davar.*”

There has been no other point in time like ours, particularly here in America, when the horrible consequences of abandoning modesty were so apparent. Every day brings newspaper reports of terrible incidents, a point has been reached where there is a fear to walk the street in many parts of the city, and everyone concedes that this is due to the fact that ‘modern’ openness has resulted in the abandonment of modesty.

And Jewish women and girls, especially those who believe in Torah and practice *mitzvos*, should adapt this mode of dress?! Does that make sense?

THE EMPTY FEAR OF BEING OLD-FASHIONED

As we explained earlier, we dare not believe that the Jewish women who are lenient during the summer about dressing modestly are in fact truly immoral, *chas veshalom*. On the contrary, since modesty is an inborn Jewish quality, it must certainly be very difficult for a good deal of women and girls to dress immodestly, and it is likely a sacrifice they make with great effort. The reason why they feel compelled to do so is the impression that they'll otherwise be deemed 'old-fashioned,' or that she will be suspected of being an 'extremist,' Heaven spare us.

Let us consider: Who are the 'they' that we're so afraid of? What kind of precious jewel is being tossed away out of this groundless fear? What sort of abyss are we throwing ourselves into, and what for?!

THEY WON'T BE A 'HORSE' ANYMORE...

There is a story told of two boys who were playing 'wagon driver and horse.' After playing for a while, the boy who was the 'wagon driver' took his friend the 'horse' and tied him to a tree, but forgot to return. Someone passed by and discovered the boy who was bound to the tree standing and crying, and asked what was wrong. The boy explained that he'd been playing with his friend and that he was the 'horse,' and that the 'wagon driver' had forgotten to come back for him. When

the fellow asked the child why he didn't just untie himself and go home, the boy wailed: "Because then I won't be a 'horse' anymore..."

Ultimately, being afraid of "the street" is no different than the fear of no longer being a "horse". Aside from the fact that even if the fear were justified, we are instructed at the very beginning of Shulchan Aruch, "Do not be ashamed of scoffers," the truth is that these concerns are entirely unfounded. The general reaction in America to seeing a Jewish woman dressed and behaving modestly is respect. The only people who will make fun are the kind whose opinions in every other area are simply mortifying.

IN THE SUMMER

The Torah is true at all times, and modesty needs to be practiced at all times, both in the summer and in the winter. This is particularly the case today, when the immodest modernism has gone so dreadfully bankrupt, demonstrating its disastrous results to the entire world including non-Jews. A Jewish woman must not only not be ashamed, but she should be proud of her modest clothing, of wearing a *sheitel*, sleeves and stockings like a Jewish woman must, during both winter and summer, in the city as well as on vacation.

We must remain focused on the significance of observing modesty, and on what we lose if we don't.



When the fellow asked the child why he didn't just untie himself and go home, the boy wailed: "Because then I won't be a 'horse' anymore..."

"BRINGING THEM CLOSE TO TORAH"

Here's a final point in response to an argument we hear sometimes:

We must certainly do what we can to bring Jews closer to Torah and *Yiddishkeit*. We must certainly "love people and bring them closer to Torah," as our sages instruct us, but, as the Rebbe astutely notes at every opportunity, it explicitly states that the people must be brought close to Torah, not that the Torah be brought closer to them, *chas veshalom*. Both *halacha* and experience tell us that when a Torah law is bent in an attempt to bring someone closer, it is not only in violation of *halacha*, but also fails to achieve anything. On the contrary, we descend to their level, and they certainly never attain whatever it was we wished to bring them closer to.

If this is the case for all *mitzvos*, it is certainly true for modesty. A Jewish woman who dresses like a Jewish woman should, even during the summer, who doesn't frequent places that a Jewish woman shouldn't (beaches etc.), will ultimately elicit more respect for *Yiddishkeit*, and will ultimately bring others closer to *Yiddishkeit* more quickly, as someone whose behavior stands apart.

Now, when the summer arrives, is the time to conduct a campaign for Jewish modesty, for ourselves and among our acquaintances, and we will personally be amazed at how, on the one hand, the mockery from "the street" will turn out to be negligible, and, on the other hand, our words, when "emanating from the heart" and accompanied by actions, will also "penetrate the heart." **P**

Priorities

RABBI SHOLOM BER AVTZON

When the Rogatchover Gaon was a young child, his father brought him to the Tzemach Tzedek. The Tzemach Tzedek placed his hands on the boy's head and blessed him to be knowledgeable in Torah. The bracha was fulfilled and his brilliance was world renowned.

While he engaged many scholars in Talmudic discussions, he showed a special affinity to the bochurim of Tomchei Temimim. Therefore many Temimim who lived in proximity of his city Dvinsk made sure to stop off by him on their return. Normally on the way there he would engage them in learning and on the way back he would ask them about the Rebbe Rashab's wellbeing and to repeat something that they heard from the Rebbe.

Once, a few bochurim came to him and he asked them, "Where are you going?" Some replied, "We are going to the Rebbe in Leningrad," while others said "We are going to Leningrad to the Rebbe."

So he asked, "Are you going to the Rebbe in Leningrad, or are you going to Leningrad to the Rebbe?"

Seeing their bewildered expression which showed they meant, "What is the difference?" he told them: "There are thirteen differences in *halacha* between these statements, (and you now you have a *halacha* to ponder on your way). The most obvious difference is, when a chossid is travelling on Sukkos. If he is going to the Rebbe, the halacha dictates that whoever is going to see his teacher on Sukkos, he is exempt from the obligation of eating in a sukkah, [if that would hinder or delay him in fulfilling the mitzvah of going to his Rebbe]. However, if he is going to Leningrad, and once he is there he will also utilize the opportunity to visit his Rebbe, then he is obligated to eat in a sukkah during his journey."

The mashpia **Reb Volf Greenglass** related this story when he shared with us a directive the Rebbe had given him, "Inform the *bochurim* that when they are leaving the Yeshiva to come to New York, they are travelling to be by the *farbrengen* and not in order to go window shopping on Kingston Avenue."

I was reminded of this story at a *farbrengen* led by **Reb Berel Mochkin** of Montreal a few years ago. He opened the *farbrengen* with the following story:

Reb Avrohom Parshan of Toronto was a close friend of Reb Berke Chein. So whenever Reb Avrohom would visit Eretz Yisroel, he made the attempt to visit him in Kfar Chabad. One time he arrived there in the morning when Reb Berke was in the cheder teaching his talmidim.

Being that he donated generously to the Cheder, he walked over and sat in the class watching how Reb Berke taught his young talmidim. Towards the end of that lesson, Reb Berke began asking the students questions on what was taught.

When one boy couldn't answer the question posed to him, Reb Berke asked him, "Dear talmid, did you wash *negel vasser* today?" The student replied, "I was in a rush and didn't have the time to do so." Reb Berke instructed the boy to go and wash his hands.

Surprised as to why Reb Berke's response to the boy's inability to answer was questioning him if he washed *negel vasser*, Reb Avrohom asked him, "What is the connection between one and the other?"

Reb Berke replied, "Now I am being paid to teach and take care of the children. When my responsibility for them is over, at the end of the day, I can explain it to you." And he resumed teaching the *talmidim*.

At the end of the school day, Reb Berke explained; "That boy is one of the brightest boys in the class. How then could he not know the answer to that question, which wasn't a difficult one? I realized that obviously his day started off wrong and that is preventing him from learning. So I surmised that either he missed saying *modeh ani* or washing *negel vasser*. If you noticed, once he returned he answered everything he was asked."

This story, continued Reb Berel at the *farbrengen*, is illuminating. Emphasis has to be put on the foundation. A strong and firm foundation can hold up a building even in the face of turbulent winds. Whereas a foundation that was compromised can be problematic. The *chassidishe modeh ani* and *negel vasser* by the bed is the foundation of the entire day.



Reb Berel continued by applying this story to *biskashrus* and traveling to the Rebbe. The way we begin our day defines and qualifies the rest of the day:

Hundreds, in fact thousands of chassidim travelled from far and wide to be by the Rebbe on Gimmel Tammuz.

Boruch Hashem, we all have families and needs, so we come with a long list of things to take care of. The children

need seforim for the upcoming school year. The Chabad House needs mezuzos and some other necessities for our *baalei batim*. We may have food orders and other things to pick up. We have to meet a *menabel* to convince him/her to accept my or someone else's child into their *mosad*. Plus numerous other errands for necessities and needs to be taken care of. The list is very long indeed.

Included on the list, perhaps even on the very top of the list, is written in bold letters, "Daven by the Ohel for..."

The question is, is being by the Ohel one of the many things, and perhaps the most important thing that I have to attend to. But as soon as it is done I check it off, DONE. Or is it that I am going to the Ohel and that is why I am here. Only that once I am in the area, I will also attend to other important matters for my family and *shlichus*.



For those of us who live locally, the Rogatchover's question rings even more deeply. We don't have to interrupt our lives and put out money to travel, and we might not even be taking off a day from work. How will we make this day special? How will we demonstrate to our family and to ourselves that this day is special and meaningful?

Perhaps by waking up a few hours earlier in order to go to the Ohel before work? Or

If that is our approach, we will begin our *avoda* by going to the *mikva* and learning one of the Rebbe's *maamorim* or *sichos* without rushing through it, *daven* like a chossid, thinking at least the *pirush hamilos*, and only then proceed to write the PA"R and proceed to the Ohel.

Reb Berel concluded: If this takes half of the day, it is no big deal, because this is why I travelled to New York. I came to be by and with the Rebbe. If I don't have enough time to attend to all the other things on my list, so what, it is not the end of the world. Whatever else I managed to take care of was extra benefits of the trip.

Perhaps to frame Reb Berel's message in the Rogatchover's language: I am going to the Rebbe, and if I meet other people, in Leningrad or Brooklyn, and have the ability to take care of other things, wonderful. If not, my trip was a success because I was with the Rebbe.

perhaps by participating in a *farbrengen* longer than usual? Those things are important, but it must not stop there. Our *biskashrus* activities must be a focal point on Gimmel Tammuz and throughout the year.

We must see to it that our connection to the Rebbe doesn't become another 'To-Do' on our list, but an important priority. **P**

Lama Harei'osa

SARA GOLD

Feeling at one
With all of the pain
Suffered throughout the world
And throughout the ages

Big or little
Illness, loss, and broken hearts
All the same –
Real, harsh, raw pain
And the feeling – crushed and broken
How do they get up?

It is true
This world – it is a garden too
But over here
Pain is real
And oy – there is so much of it...
Hashem...!

No-one said
Galus would be easy
But I know that everything He does
Is for the good
And I so much want to fly above
Beyond the clouds...
And see the way it looks from there!
Hashem!
Why is our vision so blurry?!

If pain has to exist –
Why can't we see the hidden good?!
Hashem
Why the tears?
WHY?!

Hashem...
I'm coming to believe again
That there's a plan
A reason to my pain
My sadness and confusion
And – dare I think – a reason to each pain this world contains

Because, I think
It's hard to live without belief
That there is a purpose
To the messy picture that we see

But why Hashem?!
And what will be the future – can we dare to hope?
Are we mute pawns and passengers
In the roller coaster ride of life?
I do not know...

I only know –
That there's sweetness that You taste
In the darkness that we feel
And the battle that we wage

And the cherry on top
Is the faint glimmer of faith
That emerges from the blackened battlegrounds

A ROV Versus a Rabbi

RABBI AHARON LINDENBLIT

As the years go by, small anash communities are developing in more and more locations around the globe as a result of successful hafatza by the Rebbe's shlichim. An anash community has its own distinct needs that vary from the needs of the "Chabad House regulars." The shliach usually sees his job as drawing non-frum people close to Yiddishkeit and nurturing those that he has already brought close. He doesn't have the time or means to properly oversee the needs of anash, and he often doesn't see that as his responsibility.

One of the needs of a frum community is a competent moreh hora'ah. In this article we would like to point out the crucial need for one in developing anash communities, and the responsibility of anash to pull together their resources to provide this service for themselves.

A byproduct of the blessed phenomenon of new *anash* communities is the blurring of the distinction between a *shliach* or a congregational rabbi and a *rav moreh hora'ah* who *paskens shailos*. Sincere *yungeliet*, attempting to live their lives according to the highest *halachic* standards, commonly refer all their *shailos* to their local *shliach*, who in an attempt to assist them, fields the questions either based on his own store of knowledge and research expertise, or by consulting

a recognized *moreh hora'ah*. This often gives unsuspecting community members the impression that their pulpit rabbi and *shliach* - who never saw himself as a *posek* - is the address for serious *halachic shailos* that inevitably arise in a *frum* household.

Another reason for the prevalence of asking *shailos* to pulpit rabbis is the fact that there is a shortage of competent *morei hora'ah* within the global *anash* community, which makes the available

Rabbonim Mordechai Altein, ►
Zalman Shimon Dworkin
and Yisroel Jacobson.

ones not easy to get hold of. Due to these factors, various other means of obtaining *halachic* information have crept into our society. Whether it's *beterim* from the grapevine, heard from a neighbor who heard from her modern orthodox cousin who heard it from a YCT graduate, or plain rumors based on misunderstandings. People also sometimes become their own *rabbonim* by using *sifrei melaktim* (concise compilations on various topics) or Rabbi Google. Perhaps to combat these developments *shluchim* feel forced to field the *shailos* they receive, since they figure it's better that the *baalei batim* rely on them who possess basic knowledge of *halacha*, than on their own understanding.

Often people lack the knowledge to determine whether a question is a real *shaila* or merely an open-and-shut case explicit in *Shulchan Aruch*. That's where a *shliach* or pulpit rabbi can assist. But it is imperative for every *frum Yid* to have a relationship with a *moreh hora'ah* that he trusts.

This essay should empower people by giving them the information to be educated *halachic* consumers, allowing



Credit: Lubavitch Archives

There is a popular myth that having *semicha* automatically enables someone to *pasken* a *shaila* as if by magic.

people to make an informed choice when choosing a *rov*.

Imagine we were dealing with serious medical questions. Would anyone deem it responsible to consult a high school biology teacher that has some familiarity with medicine? Likewise halachic *shailos* need to be addressed to a professional *posek*. When one chooses a medical specialist, one researches first to ascertain whether they are competent and experienced. How much more so when dealing with serious *shailos*.

There is a popular myth that having *semicha* automatically enables someone to *pasken* a *shaila* as if by magic. People possess a worldview adopted from the secular academic world where learning is done to obtain a degree. Once one has the "*semicha*



Credit: Lubavitch Archives

A *rov* is not a magician that can pull *heterim* out of a hat. A *rov* is there to tell you what it says in *Shulchan Aruch* about your particular case. If the case is different than what you are reporting, then the *heter* that the *rov* gave is irrelevant to your situation.

degree” then it’s assumed he can *pasken* about any subject. It’s therefore important for us to understand what *semicha* has become today in many circles.

First of all “*semicha*” is on a tiny fraction of *Shulchan Aruch* pertaining to **certain parts** of the *halachos* of *kasbrus*. The vast majority of *halachic* topics are not covered. Moreover, in the contemporary Chabad *yeshiva* system, the parts of *Shulchan Aruch* studied to earn *semicha* are the first area of *halacha* that a *bochur* has a chance to study somewhat in depth. As a result, not only does a holder of “*semicha*” have very limited area of expertise, moreover, even those areas that are covered by studying for “*semicha*”

are studied by a *bochur* who hasn’t yet mastered the methodology of *halacha*. Hence, more often than not, he is unable to derive practical *halachic* conclusions from what he is learning.

Add to all that that “*semicha*” has been cheapened. Too many unlettered folks are ending up with “*semicha*.” The reasons for this fact are irrelevant; what matters is that laymen must understand that having “*semicha*” is meaningless for competently *paskening* a *shaila*.

Aside from the importance of consulting a qualified *rov*, being an “educated *halachic* consumer” entails being aware of the difference between a question of *halachic* nature as opposed to a question

of practical nature. A *rov* doesn't become any less qualified if he is unable to answer whether a certain is *hechsher* is up to par, or what time *shkiah* is.

Additionally people unaware of the amount of knowledge it takes to *pasken* a *shaila* often have this juvenile unrealistic expectation that a *rov* must know every chapter in *Shulchan Aruch* relating to every topic, and also be aware of the latest developments in science, technology, medicine, engineering, food production, *kasbrus* politics, etc. A prevalent attitude is that if a *rov* says "I don't know," he's shirking his responsibility. The application of *halacha* to the modern life is a vast subject that requires specific specialties. Just like in medicine, rare is an individual that has mastered every area.

Another obvious point is that among *poskim* themselves there are different levels of expertise and authority. Reb Zalman Shimon Dvorkin would refer certain *shailos* to Reb Moshe Feinstein. The Nodah Bi'Yehudah writes regarding a certain area of *halacha* that it should only be *paskened* by *gedolei hador*. In responsa pertaining to family planning and birth control, Reb Moshe Feinstein writes that these questions should not be addressed to a regular *rov*, but rather to a serious *posek*.

Some people have dangerously placed *rabbonim* on a pedestal, lending significance to what they say no matter whether it applies to their particular circumstance. For example, not being

honest and forthright about one's circumstances to receive a *beter* to use birth control renders the *beter* meaningless. A *rov* is not a magician that can pull *beterim* out of a hat. A *rov* is there to tell you what it says in *Shulchan Aruch* about your particular case. If the case is different than what you are reporting, then the *beter* that the *rov* gave is irrelevant to your situation.

As mentioned, today there are only a limited number of *rabbonim paskening* for all of *anash*. They are inundated with *shailos* from people who are not members of their community. They are not paid to answer *shailos* from everywhere, and they have families and lives too. There are four-thousand *shluchim* couples and the vast majority of them are situated in locations without a *moreh hora'ab*. We must wake up to this reality and start seeking solutions.

One solution is easier said than done but not completely outlandishly impractical. *Anash* and *shluchim* must band together and organize a group of *rabbonim* that are working in other fields for financial reasons, such as in *yeshivas* or in *kasbrus*, to man a hotline for *shailos*. This could be funded by presenting it as a service for which a family pays a yearly membership fee which gives you a unique access number. This could support a number of full time *rabbonim* just to *pasken* for *shluchim* and *anash* in small communities. **P**

THE GIFT OF A *Mother*

————— HADDASA L.

0 MONTHS

Dear Mommy,

I made my entry into this world surrounded by cries of Mazal Tov. I saw your face, hidden behind a black box. You were beaming with joy and relief. But I could only see part of it as your finger snapped away.

I gave a loud cry and let you know I was hungry. You put down the black box and peered at me with a worried look on your face. You picked me up and pulled me close, allowing me to bask in the warmth of your arm. You looked at me tenderly, and then picked up the black box again, cooing at it with delight and telling it how cute I am, interacting with my bubby and aunts, checking the news... I closed my eyes and fall asleep.

10 MONTHS

Dear Mommy,

I am holding on to the couch and I pull myself up. I teeter, I totter but I stay

upright. And then I move! I am walking! You are so excited! You are so proud!

You pull out your black box and talk to me from behind it. You tell me what a big girl I am. You tell me that I just took my first step! You record these moments for all posterity. But I can't see your face, I don't feel your arms. You are talking to your black box, not to me.

It's OK though. I am used to it by now. The same thing happened when I first smiled, my first roll, my first crawl. And now my first steps.

So I dutifully smile and I wonder.

5 YEARS

Dear Mommy,

It's a gorgeous spring day and you take me to the park so I can run around. I love going to the park! I can't wait to show you all the tricks I learned in school. Did you know I can climb the monkey bars all by myself? I can also hopscotch to the end!



I call your name and try to show you what I can do, but you are busy on your black box. You tell me "one minute." But in "one minute" it's already dark and it's time to go home.

14 YEARS

Dear Mommy,

I'm all grown up now and on my own. You lost out on connecting with me because you were busy with your black box: Checking the weather, the news, a whatsapp video, or someone else's vacation pictures. In the meantime you forgot about me. And you wonder why I don't feel a connection to you.

22 YEARS

Dear baby,

Mazal Tov! I am so happy to be with you and hold you close by, with my black box tucked away. Don't worry, I am here for you; everything else can wait.

As you grow up I will enjoy spending time with you, recording only on occasion. I will turn off my black box when I am spend time with you. I will spend time to plan and do things together. Instead of answering calls from others, I will answer your calls.

Life is short and you will grow up so fast. I want to spend time with you. I want to give you the gift of a mother. **P**

My Perspective

READERS WRITE

—Let's Take Back Our Shuls—

Jacob S.

A shul is called a miniature Beis HaMikdash. It is a place designated for tefillah, which causes a revelation of the Divine presence, and lets the community become more aware of the Almighty's presence and to praise Him.

Sadly to say, in some shuls, instead of giving praise to the Almighty, they insult Him. These shuls have become social clubs.

On Shabbos, a day which is reserved for a more spiritual connection with our Creator, a foretaste of the world to come, the situation only worsens. There's even more talking, and small children, who are too young to participate in the service in any way, are invited as well. The shul begins to resemble more closely

a community picnic than a place for connecting with the Almighty.

I believe that many of those who do this are not intentionally trying to disgrace the Almighty, G-d forbid, but they simply don't realize what they are doing. They have forgotten what a shul is truly all about. Since this action has become commonplace, they don't see the severity, as Sages describe, of these sins which we step on with our feet.

The responsibility of setting the proper atmosphere should lie on the shoulders of the Rabbi of the shul. Besides his being a living example of how to act in a shul, he must guide and enforce his congregation in behaving in a way that the shul becomes

a proper place for this revelation of the Divine presence. Does the Rabbi have zero-tolerance for talking during davening or does he perhaps ignore a little? If this Rabbi gave a kosher certification for a restaurant, would it be OK for him to say it is 99% kosher and only 1% unkosher?

I have been in shuls where a person could be talking during the Torah reading and he will still get called up for an aliya. Or he talks during davening and is then asked to lead the Musaf prayer. (I know of a case where a Rabbi asked someone who would consistently talk during davening to be the chazan in order to identify with the feelings of any chazan when he is davening and someone talks. This implies that we should be careful to respond to the chazan because of concern for the chazan's feelings and honor! What about the honor of the Almighty?)

Is this Rabbi so lenient when it comes to his own honor? If someone would insult him publicly, would that person get an

aliya, would he be able to lead the musaf? If only this Rabbi would be as careful about the Almighty's honor as his own, what a better shul it would be.

Although it's the Rabbi's responsibility to set the tone, every congregant must be involved. Let's say for example someone was being disrespectful to your father, what would be your reaction? Would you say, "I don't want to get involved"? How would you treat this person who was disrespectful to your father? Does not the Almighty's honor require at least the same amount of effort?

We say, "We want Moshiach now." Moshiach will bring the Third Temple with a revelation of the Divine Presence. But how can we say we want that revelation when we reject the "foretaste" we are given in our shul?

May we speedily merit, through our respecting the small sanctuary, to be able to give the Almighty respect in the Third Beis HaMikdash.

— The Point of Written Tests —

Yebudis M.

Thank you for your wonderful publication. It is the forerunner in discussing the standards in our community in general,

and particularly in *chinuch al pi ruach rabisainu nesaiainu*.

Our modern day school system relies on written tests to grade a student's progress. Unfortunately, more often than not, the smarter children don't need to listen in class to pass, and the simple ones, with all their studying barely make it, leaving them with a very bad taste of school (and by extension – *Yiddishkeit*).

On several occasions, I have heard senior *mechanchim* suggest the use of verbal tests ("*farbers*"), as they were done in the cheder of old. In this system, each student is questioned according to his or her level (and style) of comprehension. Simpler students are inconspicuously asked simple questions, and smarter ones are challenged according to their capabilities (and yes, if they didn't learn according to their capabilities, they will receive a lower grade). I have heard from

teachers that this is just as good of a gauge as a written test.

A friend of mine told me that she attended an evening on chinch in one of our community's mosdos where the speaker spoke about the importance of educating each child in their own way. Not long after, her daughter's teacher informed her that her daughter was failing in class because she wasn't passing the tests since "she gets overly nervous from tests." The teacher was absolutely closed to testing the child in any other way.

This makes me really wonder if our standardized way of testing has much to do with truly grading the individual student, as it has to do with the teacher's convenience and proof for the teacher's performance.

Secular Studies (10)

Chaim V.

Thank you very much for your high quality publication full of *toichen* and real guidance for life.

I really enjoyed the article in issue 10 "Conversations with Reb Yoel," and I found it very enlightening. I was particularly fascinated by the fact that

some of his statements differed from "mainstream thinking," which makes me wonder whether perhaps other common beliefs about the Rebbe's opinion are also inaccurate.

There was one thing that I myself was unclear about:

You quote Reb Yoel as having said that it is acceptable for girls to learn secular studies, and that the Rebbe's campaign against secular studies targeted the boys. However, does that mean that there aren't any restrictions regarding girl's study of *chol* in quantity, material and/or attitude?

It would seem to me that being steeped in secular ideas is unhealthy for a girl's *yiddishkeit*. The prominence of *limmudei chol* in some girl's schools exceeds that of *limmudei kodesh*, which is bound to subconsciously impact the students' minds. (It is quite possible that one of the main successes of seminary is the girls are totally immersed in *kodesh* only.)

More importantly: Much of the materials that are used in girl's High Schools are not just *chol* but are completely inappropriate. Secular literature is seeping with secular attitudes in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. While schools are careful to omit teachings of "the age of the universe" and the like, they are not as careful about the literature, which is much more alluring. (I don't think most of today's girl's care much about the age of the universe.)

We can use some clear guidance on what is considered appropriate and can be used, and what is completely unsuitable.

Are We Winning?

Dovid S.

There is a well known story regarding the Rebbe Rashab's answer to a leading rabbi of his time on his proposal to join with non-religious groups to influence on them and strengthen Yiddishkeit. While this Rabbi admitted that the proposal was not ideal, it was necessary to fight assimilation. To make his point stronger, he used a metaphor: If a fire is burning, the water one uses to extinguish it doesn't have to be so clean.

The Rebbe Rashab, who saw the danger in this rabbi's proposal, replied using the very same metaphor: Although the water does not have to be clean, you must ensure that you are using water and not kerosene. Simply said, his proposal to fight assimilation would actually make the situation worse.

It's obvious that the issue was not something that was halachically

My Perspective

questionable, since that which is prohibited is not up for discussion, regardless of whatever gains may be made. The debate was about permissible things, which the Rebbe Rashab foresaw as destructive to Yiddishkeit.

In recent years certain innovations have been introduced to fight assimilation and draw Jews closer. While many of them are not halachically forbidden, we must question whether these are extinguishing the fire or fanning it.

For example: Before Gimmel Tammuz there were no mixed gatherings of college students at *pegishas*, after Gimmel Tammuz there are. Similarly, how much effort is made on campus to separate the men and women for Jewish functions?

Some may argue that it's worth it since hundreds come to the events. But let us ask ourselves, how many of them end up going on to *yeshiva*? (Of course, that

doesn't make the event pointless, but it is an indicator of something.) Although campus outreach is at least 5 times greater today than it was 30 years ago, only a small percentage of today's students go to *yeshiva*. The English speaking Baal teshuvah *yeshivos* aren't much larger than they were 30 years ago!

I don't believe that it is simply coincidental. A genuine *yiddishe* experience meaningful enough to move someone to change their life around cannot be reached in an atmosphere where young men and women are in close contact. And the same could be said about many such "kosher" concessions.

As a Baal teshuva from over 35 years ago I can speak for myself: had I been exposed to this method of *hafatza*, I don't believe I would have gone to *yeshiva* and changed to the *frum* way of life. **P**

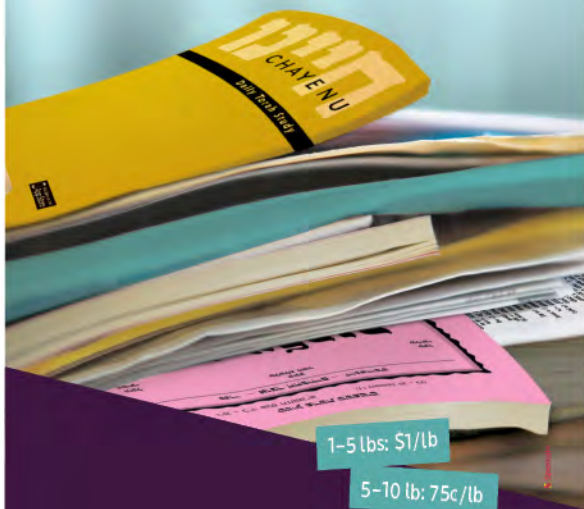
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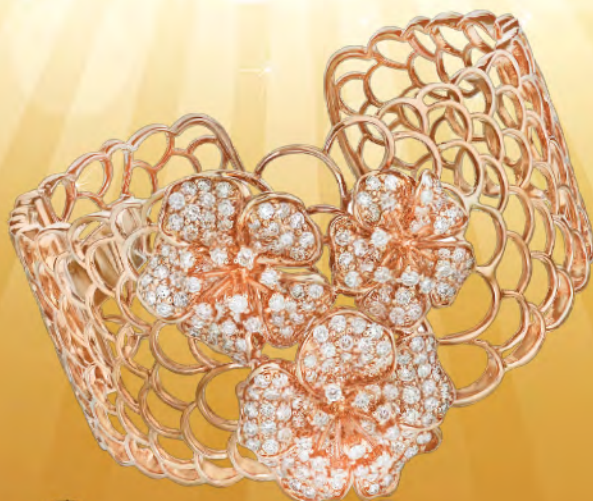


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